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# Artists & ILLUSTRATORS

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PRACTICAL GUIDES
IN WATERCOLOUR, OIL, INK AND GRAPHITE

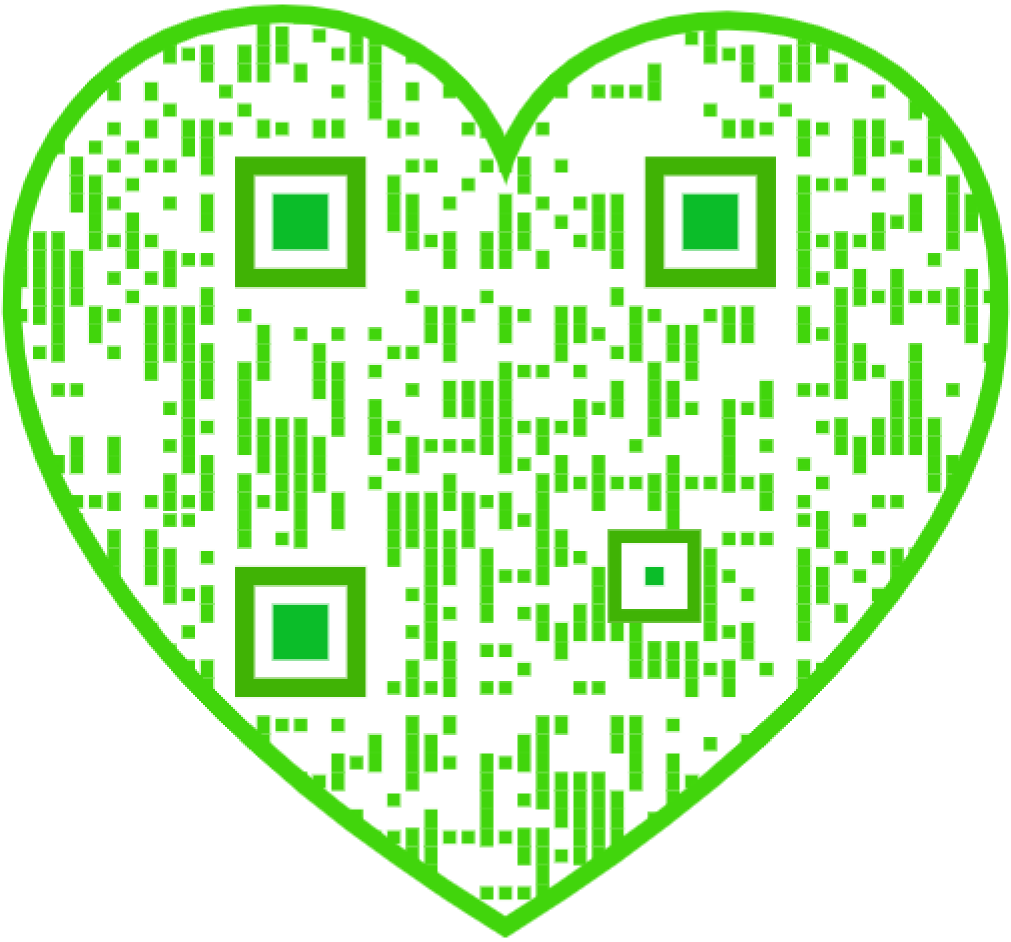
## Sensational cityscapes

Alla prima methods from the experts

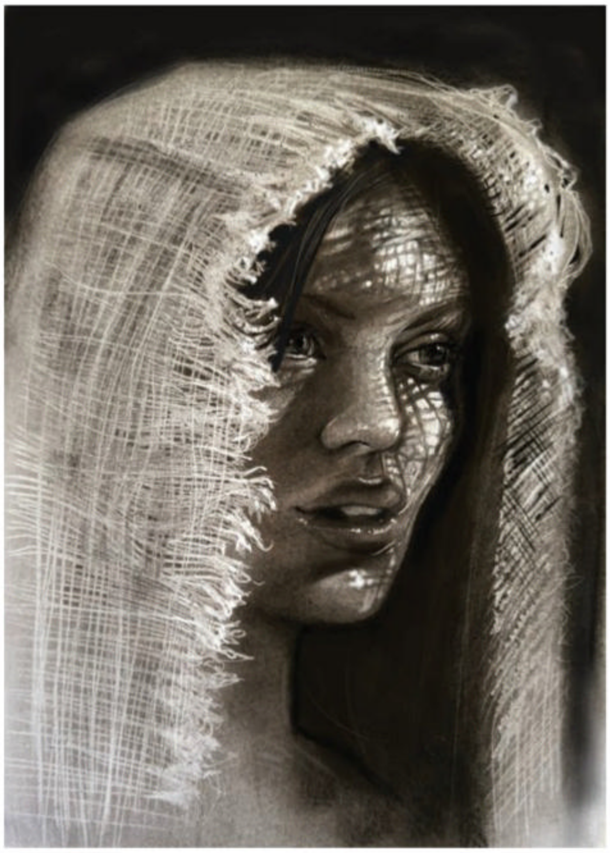
## Build your art brand

A professional shares their secrets

EXCITING ANIMAL ART PAINTINGS IN OIL AND ACRYLIC



# ENHANCE TECHNICAL SKILLS



"Portrait", 2024, by Mahi 42 cm. x 29.7 cm., Nitram Charcoal on paper

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This portrait was created to showcase the unique qualities of Nitram Charcoal. The softer grades provide fluid, painterly strokes, while the harder sticks offer the precision needed for intricate work."

~ *Mahiartss*

To watch a video of how Mahi create this drawing with Nitram Charcoal, please visit: **https://nitramcharcoal.com/Mahiartss** or **scan the QR code**

Mahi (b. Iran) completed her undergraduate degree in Graphic Design in Iran and pursued her master's degree in Turkey. She is currently a Ph.D. candidate in Painting in Turkey, working on her dissertation. In 2017, she held her first solo photography and painting exhibition titled Bakış in İzmir. Since 2019, she has been actively sharing her art on social media platforms under the name Mahiartss, starting with TikTok and later expanding her presence on Instagram and YouTube, where she continues to grow her audience. **Instagram: @mahiartss | YouTube: Mahiartss | TikTok: Mahiartss**

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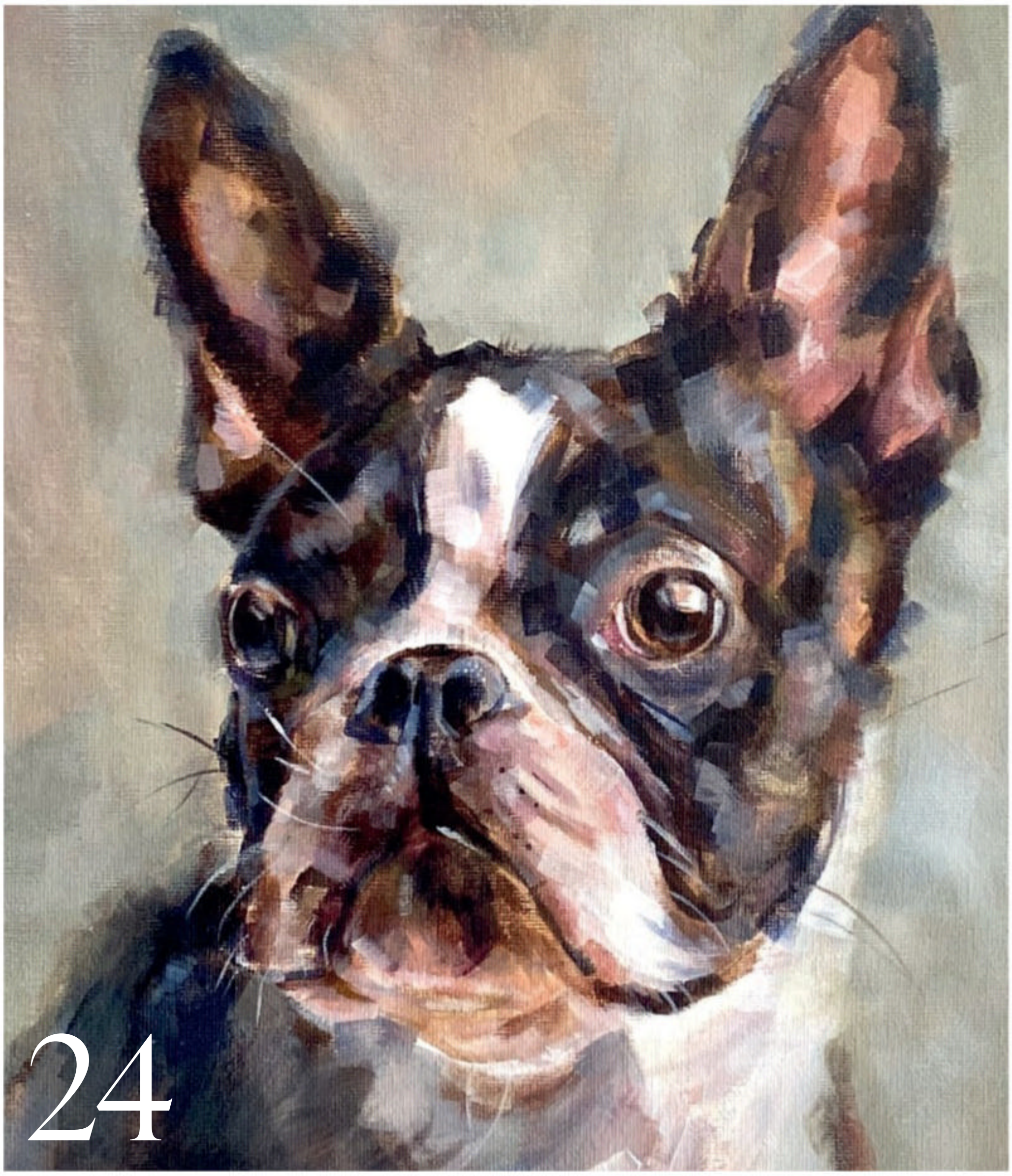

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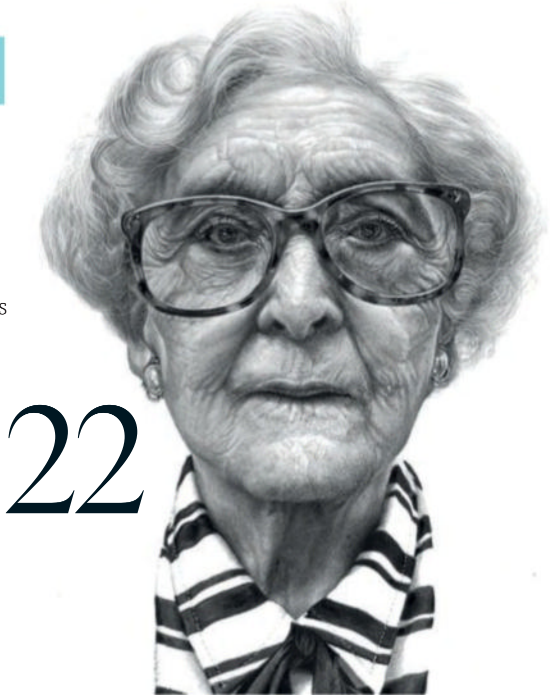

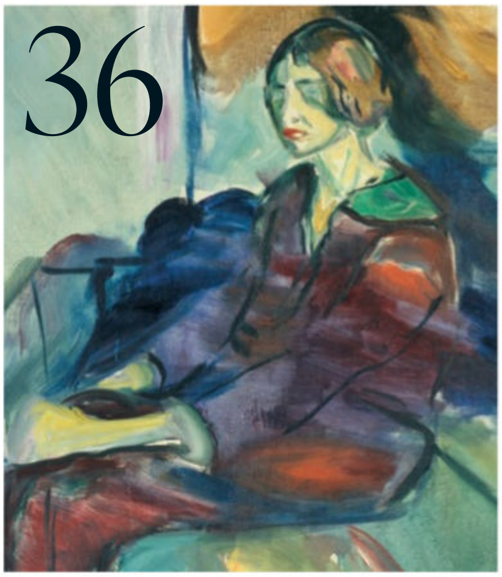

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THIS MONTH'S COVER BY MARK LAGUË

# Atmosphere, energy and startling colour...

...are just some of the things that make a painting pop. Our cover star, Canadian artist Mark Laguë, manages this with aplomb. For him, the magic is capturing urban environments, cityscapes and architecture, whilst he finds the rain and darkness add mood and atmosphere.

Another lover of street scenes is world-renowned watercolour master Alvaro Castagnet. In this issue, he demonstrates his second pillar of watercolour: shape, with his painting of a lively central London scene. Both are exciting stories from artists at the top of their game.

But, we know you like more than just this one genre which is why we always strive to mix it up. Portrait artist Jane French shows you how she painted a fellow painter in a colourful headscarf, satisfying her need to paint both people and texture, whilst Konstantin Sterkhov demonstrates how and why he deliberately chose only two watercolour paints to depict a couple embracing at the airport. For something a little more dramatic, Nick Stewart reveals how to utilise the chromatic qualities of fountain pen ink. Using just one colour, combined with tiny amounts of bleach for highlights and erasing, the results are colourful, surprising and thrilling – if you've not tried this method already, why not give it a go?

Lastly, you might be a great painter but good art rarely sells itself. Animal portrait artist, Alex Goddard has not only tapped into several art income streams that have propelled her art career and brand, but she shares her content and invaluable advice, giving other artists the chance to learn about marketing themselves – no easy feat. The secret? It's all about practise.

**Niki Browes** Editor

## INTRODUCING

**NICK STEWART**
Nick has spent much of his working life in service to many of London's top creative agencies and visualising studios as well as a sessional tutor at the University for the Creative Arts. Since 2015, he has been exploring fountain pen ink for use in illustration and calligraphy – with stunning results.

**ALEX GODDARD**
What started as painting her brother's dog has snowballed into a much bigger practice. Alex has transformed this hobby into a full-fledged business and now has several different art income streams including commissions for pet portraits, an Etsy shop, participating in craft fairs and a YouTube channel.

**STEVE CALDWELL**
Steve specialises in intensely observed portrait paintings in acrylic. After studying medical illustration at the Northeast Wales Institute, he worked extensively in the publishing and advertising industries. Today, he concentrates on figurative painting and portraiture. He has exhibited extensively.

**MARK LAGUË**
Since he was a boy, Mark has been fascinated by the way that the contrast of a light next to dark gives the illusion of form. He finds great significance in the way it affects city life, whilst he loves the challenge of consolidating and abstracting shapes to come up with something that's uniquely his own.

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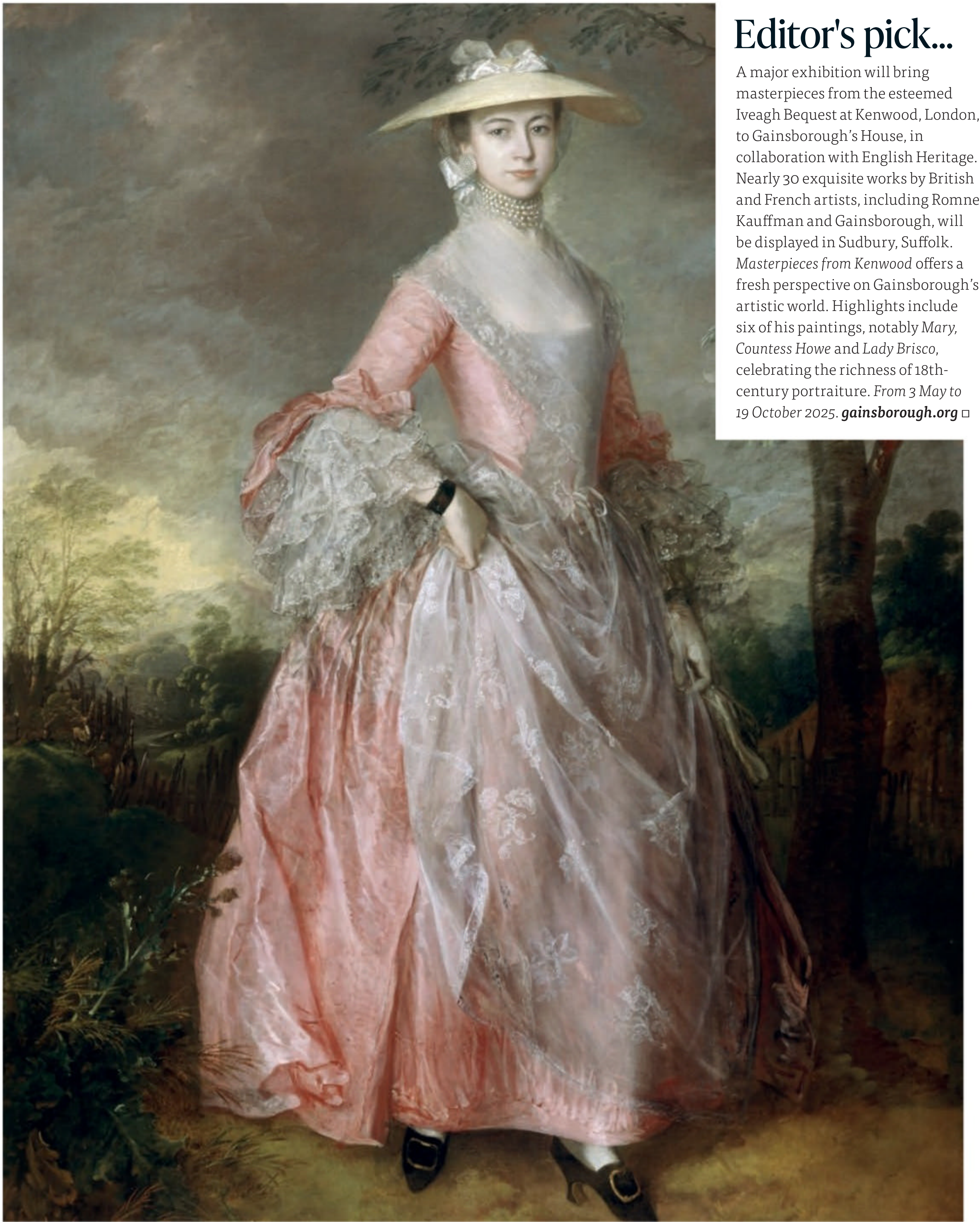
# Sketchbook

TIPS • ADVICE • EXHIBITIONS • NEWS • REVIEWS

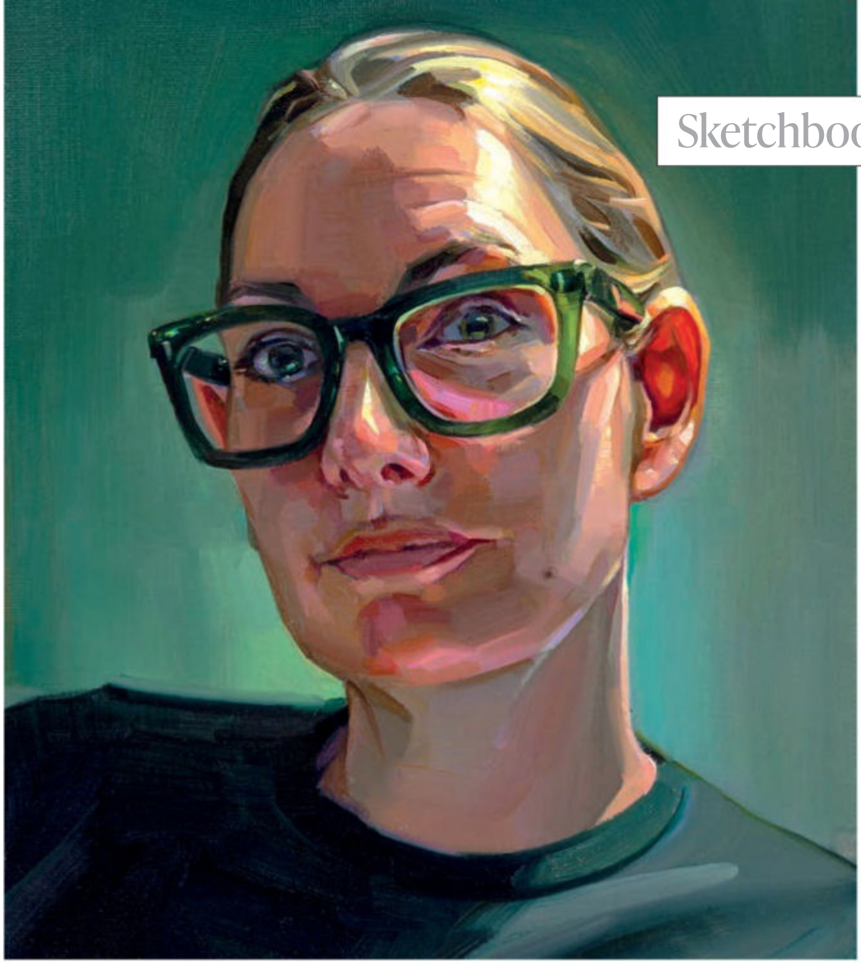
**EDITED BY RAMSHA VISTRO**

## Editor's pick...

A major exhibition will bring masterpieces from the esteemed Iveagh Bequest at Kenwood, London, to Gainsborough's House, in collaboration with English Heritage. Nearly 30 exquisite works by British and French artists, including Romney, Kauffman and Gainsborough, will be displayed in Sudbury, Suffolk. *Masterpieces from Kenwood* offers a fresh perspective on Gainsborough's artistic world. Highlights include six of his paintings, notably *Mary, Countess Howe* and *Lady Brisco*, celebrating the richness of 18th-century portraiture. *From 3 May to 19 October 2025.* **gainsborough.org** □



GAINSBOROUGH, MARY, COUNTESS HOWE, C. 1764, OIL ON CANVAS, 241.4X154.8CM, IVEAGH BEQUEST, 1929



CHARLOTTE. COURTESY OF TOM CROFT

### SKY ARTIST OF THE YEAR MASTERCLASS

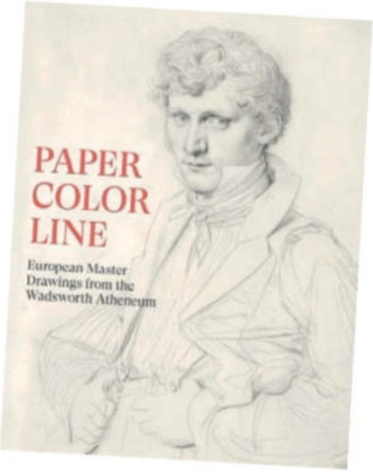
This spin-off series, offering expert-led tutorials, returns with insightful episodes featuring *Artists & Illustrators* friend Tom Croft. Available to stream on Sky Arts and Freeview via Now TV, the series offers a look at artists' creative processes. Croft presents two episodes: one on self-portraits, exploring how they reveal both physical and emotional states, and another on colour, demonstrating how to exaggerate saturation. "In this modern world of fast edits, it was nice to slow down and remind people that taking time to paint and think about tone, shape and colour is hugely rewarding," he says. ***skyartsartistoftheyear.tv/aoty-masterclass, thomascroft.co.uk***

## BOOK OF THE MONTH

### PAPER, COLOR, LINE EUROPEAN MASTER DRAWINGS FROM THE WADSWORTH ATHENEUM

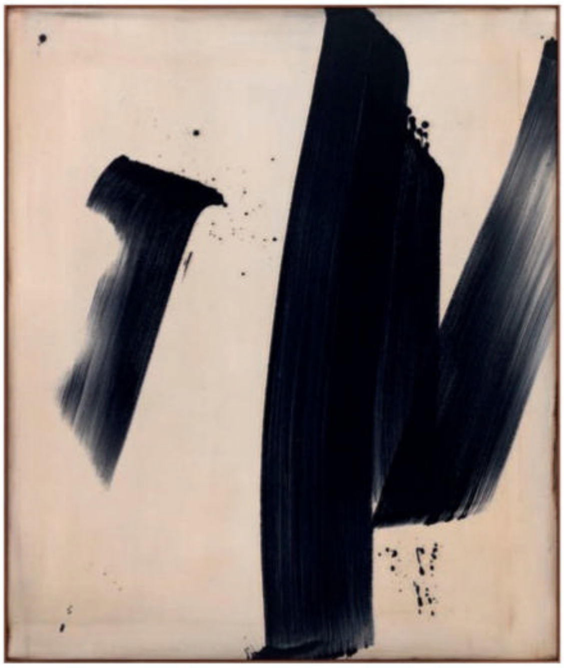
**By Oliver Tostmann**

This catalogue shines a spotlight on the Wadsworth Atheneum's impressive collection of European drawings, watercolours and pastels. It features renowned artists, including Courbet, Degas, Toulouse-Lautrec, Schiele, Klee, Miró and Picasso, and includes fresh scholarship on the works and the history of the collection. ***Paul Holberton, £40.00***



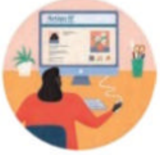
# Don't miss...

*Peut Être* is a striking new exhibition by Richard Zinon. Working from a clifftop chapel studio, Zinon explores themes of self-reflection, time and emotion through layered oil paintings that balance gestural energy with quiet contemplation. His process – building canvases over months, using earthy tones and delicate textures – creates works that feel both raw and meditative. The exhibition offers an intimate look at his evolving artistic journey, where each piece captures the fleeting nature of thought and feeling. On until 29 March 2025 at Cadogan Gallery, London. ***cadogangallery.com***



RICHARD ZINON, 1_5, 2025, OIL ON CANVAS, 190X160CM

## Join us online!



There's a ton of art inspiration amongst these pages. But if you're looking for more? Find it on the fabulous *Artists & Illustrators* website. It's one of the best digital resources for artists from every realm, whilst the refreshing redesign makes our practical guides, competitions and interviews even more insightful. See you there. ***artistsandillustrators.co.uk***

## THE DIARY

**Open calls, prizes and artist opportunities**

**31 MARCH**
If you're fascinated by mathematical art, enter the Anomalous Mathematical Patterns Sci-Art Contest. Free entry. ***sites.google.com/view/anomalousmathematicalpatterns***

**31 MARCH**
Submit your art for the Women In Art Fair Prize, an initiative tackling gender imbalance in the art world. The prize fund totals £2,650 and it costs £50 to enter. ***womeninartfair.com***

**14 APRIL**
UK-based artists can apply for the Rise by Henley Festival Emerging Artist Prize, celebrating early-career talent. Prize fund totals £2,000. Entry is free. ***henley-festival.co.uk***

**15 APRIL**
Enter the FiKVA Award, a competition for representational and figurative painters, offering a €5,000 prize fund and an online exhibition. ***fikva.art***

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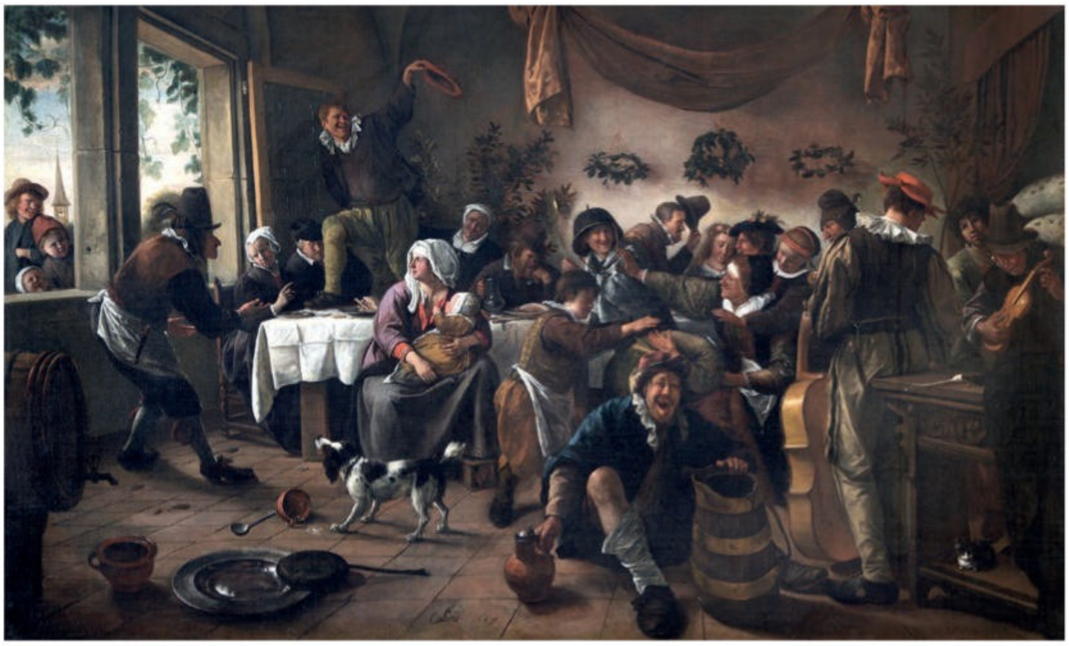

THE WEDDING PARTY, 1667, JAN STEEN © ENGLISH HERITAGE THE WELLINGTON COLLECTION, APSLEY HOUSE

# Discover...

the unexpected side of the 1st Duke of Wellington through Wellington's *Dutch Masterpieces*, a stunning rehang of his prized collection. Beyond his legendary military career, Wellington had a sharp eye for art, acquiring exquisite works by Nicolaes Maes, Pieter de Hooch and Jan Steen after his victory at Waterloo. These richly detailed scenes of everyday life, filled with hidden symbolism, offer a glimpse into his personal taste and the art world of the time. From 2 April at Apsley House, London W1J 7NT. ***wellingtoncollection.co.uk***

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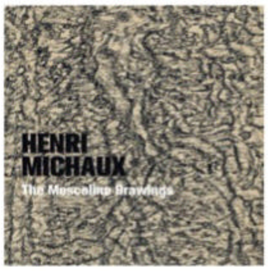
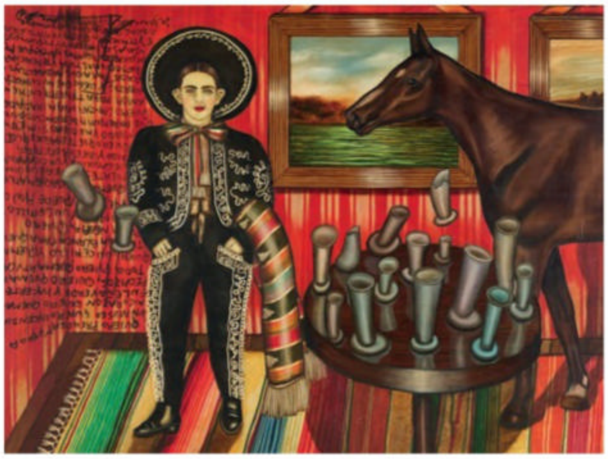


# Explore

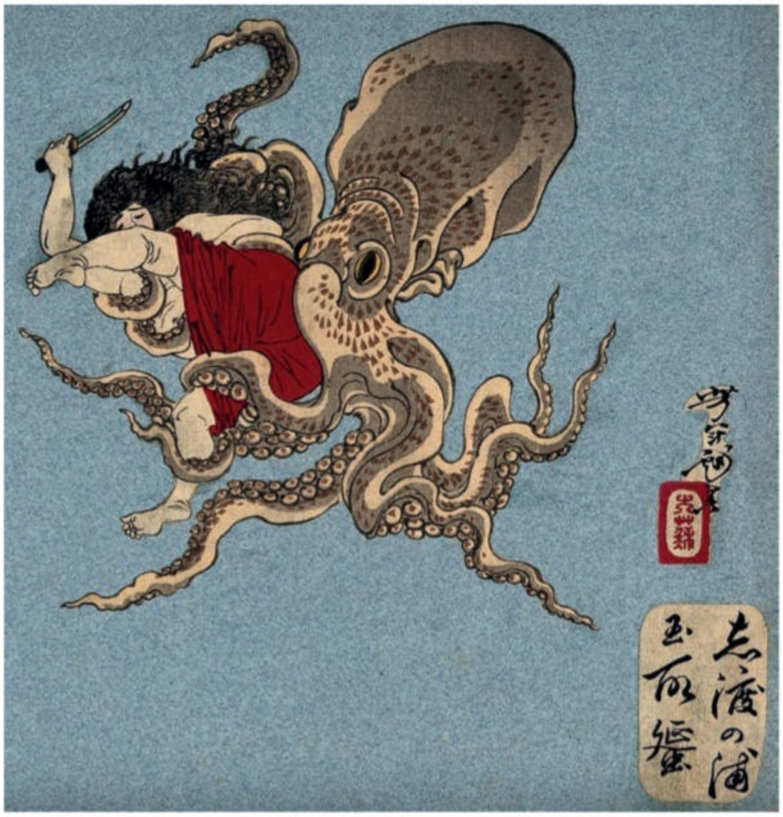
*Henri Michaux: The Mescaline Drawings* is a fascinating new book that delves into the artist's mescaline-induced creative process. In 1955, the Franco-Belgian poet and visual artist experimented with the psychedelic drug, sparking an outpouring of distinctive drawings and writings that redefined his artistic vision. Featuring essays by Franck Leibovici and Muriel Pic, this richly illustrated catalogue accompanies an exhibition at The Courtauld Gallery until 26 May 2025, and offers an in-depth look at Michaux's hypnotic, hallucinatory works. **Edited by Ketty Gottardo, £17.50. *courtauld.ac.uk***

## INSIGHT

Late Mexican artist Julio Galán's work, now on display in New York, offers valuable insights for artists looking to push boundaries. Experiment with blending different styles – folk art, graffiti and surrealism – to develop a distinctive voice. Use symbolism and layered meanings to explore themes like identity, gender and culture in ways that invite multiple interpretations. Self-representation can be a powerful tool, merging personal experience with broader social themes. Finally, embrace theatricality and bold contrasts to challenge fixed ideas and encourage deeper reflection. ***luhringaugustine.com***



JULIO GALÁN, LOS CÓMPLICES, 1987, OIL ON CANVAS, 189.9X229.9CM



TAISO YOSHITOSHI, A WOMAN ABALONE DIVER WRESTLING WITH AN OCTOPUS, C. 1870. SOURCE: WELLCOME COLLECTION

## UNDERSEA

This exhibition dives into the mysteries, myths and marine life beneath the waves. Featuring over 75 artworks from across four centuries and cultures, the exhibition showcases paintings, prints and objects that explore the ocean's beauty and symbolism. Highlights include depictions of mermaids, sea creatures and nautical folklore, with works by artists such as Paul Delvaux, Damien Hirst and Nicola Bealing. Alongside, an immersive installation celebrates Hastings' fishing heritage, making this a must-see exploration of the sea's cultural significance. **Hastings Contemporary, TN34 3DW. *hastingscontemporary.org***

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- Fun, easy, social event
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On completion of the course you will have 12 pieces of original art to cherish forever. From faces, figures, friends and family, to beautiful seaside vistas. Even if you have never picked up a brush before, we will guide you through to make it easy and fun!

This is an extremely enjoyable way to develop your creative side, make new friends and really enjoy the next few months

EASY FUN, NOW YOU CAN GET REALLY CREATIVE!

### LIMITED PLACES

To maintain a high standard to our classes and the tuition you will receive, classes are kept to small numbers – so available places are strictly limited!

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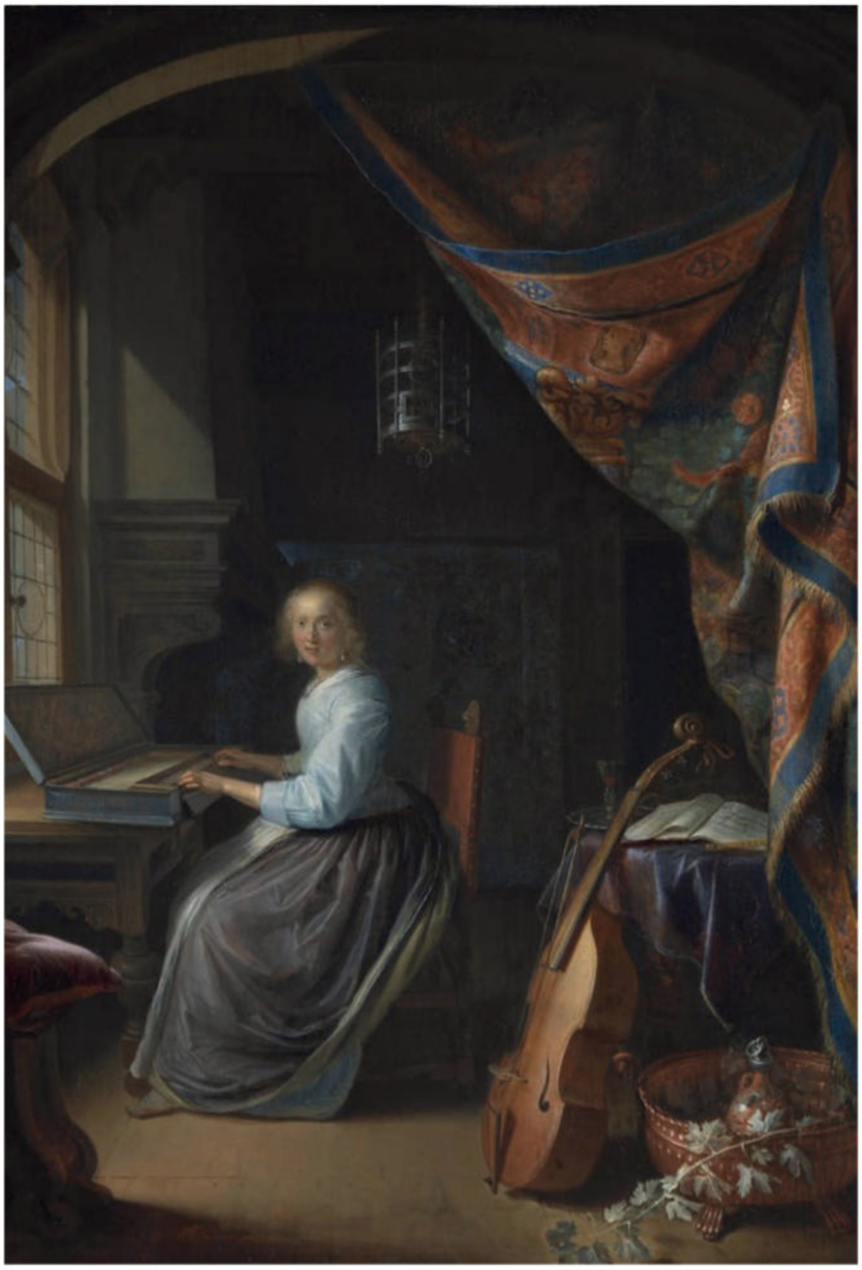
# Exhibitions

## THE BEST ART SHOWS TO VISIT FROM THIS MONTH ONWARDS



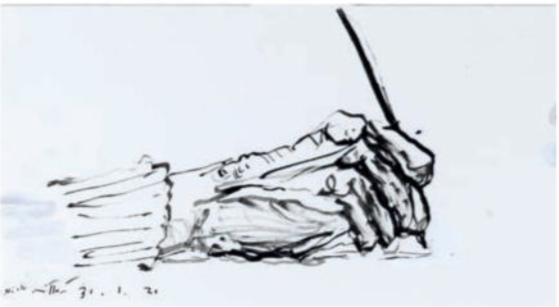
GERRIT DOU, A WOMAN PLAYING A CLAVICHORD, OIL ON OAK PANEL, C.1665, 37.7X29.9CM, DULWICH PICTURE GALLERY, LONDON

### SOMAYA CRITCHLOW: THE CHAMBER

**Until 20 July 2025**

A one-room display of new commissions by British artist Somaya Critchlow, this display marks her debut solo show in a UK public institution. Inspired by Dulwich Picture Gallery's historic collection, Critchlow presents six new works, including three large figurative paintings, alongside sketches and Old Master paintings. Drawing from classical poses and narrative traditions, she reinterprets themes of power, mythology and the female form.

***Dulwich Picture Gallery, Gallery Road, London SE21 7AD, UK. dulwichpicturegallery.org.uk***



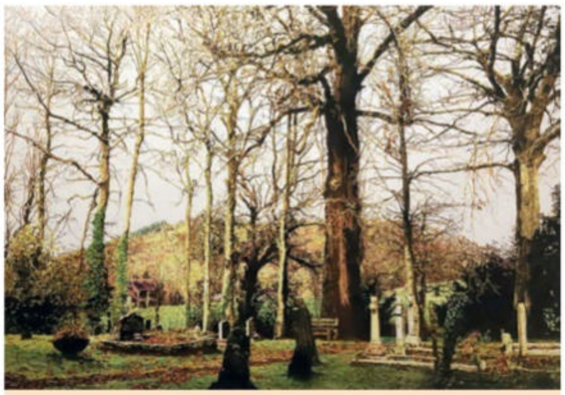
© NICK MILLER. PHOTO: NATIONAL GALLERY OF IRELAND

### AN ARTIST'S PRESENCE

**17 May to 15 September 2025**

This exhibition explores how artists embed themselves within their work. Showcasing works from the Gallery's permanent collection, the exhibition spans the 18th to the 21st century, featuring artists such as William Orpen, Elisabeth Vigée-Le Brun, Seán Keating and Nancy Lee Katz. Through self-portraits, artists at work and disctinctive pieces, it offers insight into the relationship between artist and viewer.

***National Gallery of Ireland, Merrion Square West, Dublin 2, Ireland. nationalgallery.ie***



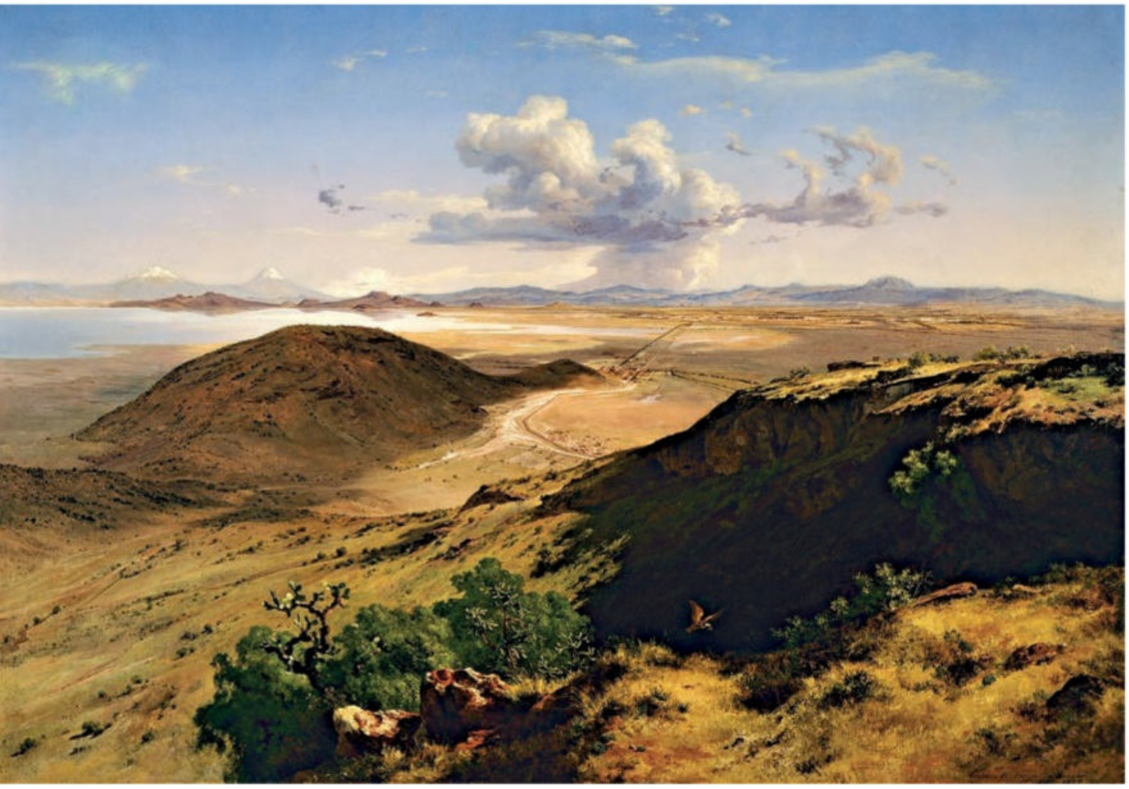
KNILL CHURCHYARD BY BY TIM CRAVEN, 2022, WATERCOLOUR, 40X54CM

### THE ARBOREALISTS

**22 March to 19 April 2025**

This show explores the enduring fascination with trees through the work of The Arborealists, a collective of 50 artists dedicated to depicting the natural world. Featuring over 40 works, it highlights the group's diverse approaches while celebrating the significance of trees in art and the environment. It offers an insight into the artistic and ecological importance of trees.

***Gallery by the Lakes, Pallington Lakes, Dorchester, Dorset DT2 8QU, UK. gallerybythelakes.co.uk***



THE VALLEY OF MEXICO FROM THE HILL OF SANTA ISABEL, JOSÉ MARÍA VELASCO, 1877. OIL ON CANVAS, 161x228.5CM. © REPRODUCCIÓN AUTORIZADA POR EL INSTITUTO NACIONAL DE BELLAS ARTES Y LITERATURA, 2024

### JOSÉ MARÍA VELASCO: A VIEW OF MEXICO

**29 March to 17 August 2025**

The first UK monographic exhibition on José María Velasco, Mexico's most celebrated 19th-century painter, showcases around 30 paintings and drawings, many from Mexican collections. Renowned for his monumental depictions of the Valley of Mexico, Velasco captured the region's beauty amid rapid industrialisation. His work, blending artistic mastery with scientific inquiry, remains largely unknown outside Mexico. This landmark exhibition coincides with 200 years of UK-Mexico diplomatic relations. ***National Gallery, Sunley Room, Trafalgar Square, London WC2N 5DN. nationalgallery.org.uk***

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JYLL BRADLEY, SELF-PORTRAIT, 1987-2024. COURTESY OF THE ARTIST

### JYLL BRADLEY: RUNNING AND RETURNING

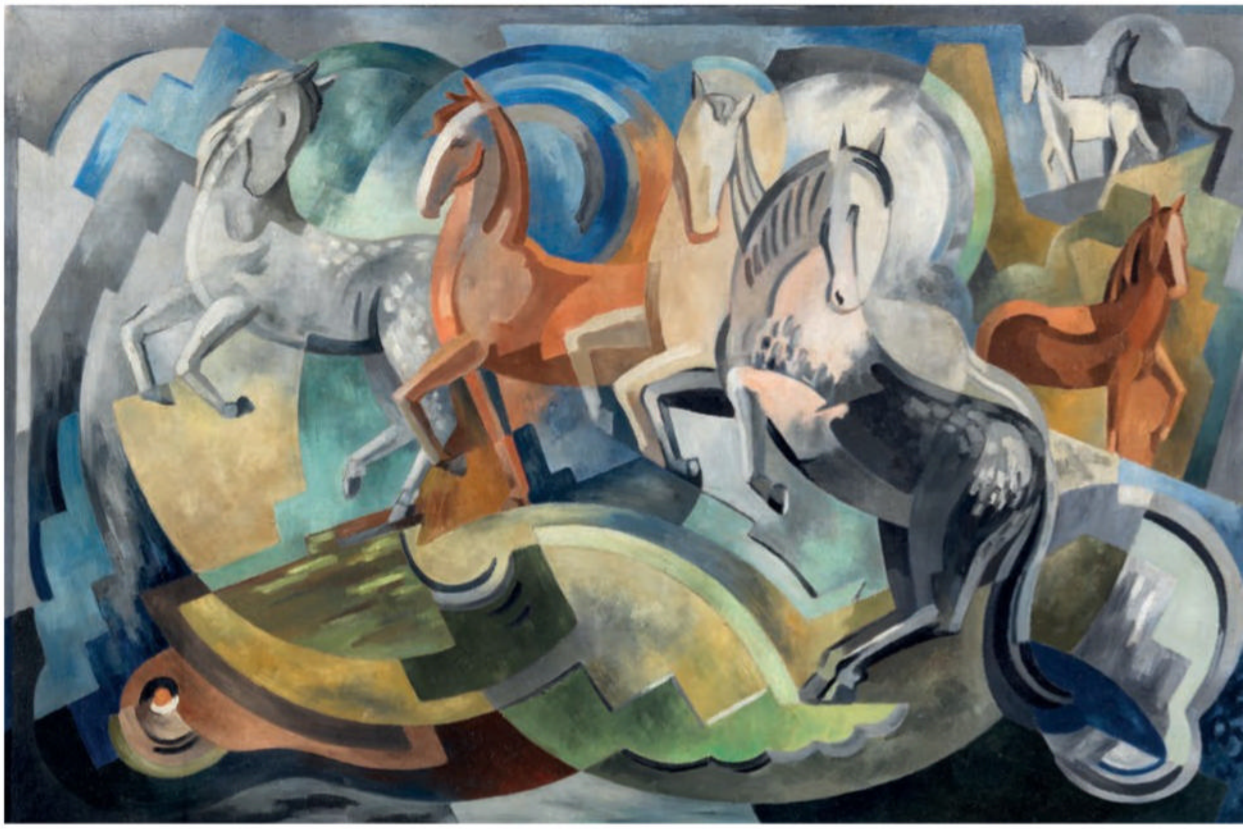
**5 April to 2 November 2025**

This major exhibition examines the career of pioneering British artist Jyll Bradley, known for her immersive light installations and minimalist aesthetic. Bringing together sculpture, film and photography, *Running & Returning* traces Bradley's deeply personal journey through themes of identity, queerness and belonging. Highlights include the UK debut of *Within a Budding Grove*, new sculptural work, and intimate self-portraits, alongside historic pieces that shaped her practice. The exhibition is a powerful meditation on light, space, and self-discovery. ***The Box, Tavistock Place, Plymouth, PL4 8AX, UK. theboxplymouth.com***

### MAINIE JELLETT AND EVIE HONE: THE ART OF FRIENDSHIP

**10 April to 10 August 2025**

This insightful exhibition explores the friendship and artistic exchange between Mainie Jellett and Evie Hone, two pioneers of modernism in Ireland. Showcasing around 90 works, it traces their careers from early training in Paris to their later artistic developments in their home country. Featuring paintings, preparatory drawings, and stained glass, the exhibition highlights their shared influences and distinct artistic identities. A rare opportunity to appreciate their impact on Irish art and modernism. ***National Gallery of Ireland, Merrion Square West, Dublin 2, Ireland. nationalgallery.ie***



JELLETT, ACHILL HORSES, PHOTO: NATIONAL GALLERY OF IRELAND

**PRIZE DRAW**

# WIN! £1,000 towards an art retreat

Enjoy a creative escape, courtesy of professional artist

**MARILYN ALLIS**

Experience a unique painting retreat at a family-run hotel on the beautiful Bournemouth seafront. Learn from three professional artists, each bringing their own expertise in watercolour and acrylic painting. Don't worry if you're a beginner; these workshops are designed for all levels, and the experienced artists will guide you every step of the way. Throughout the break, you will gain insight into various techniques and styles, allowing you to explore your creativity in a very supportive and highly inspiring environment.

Paint in studios overlooking the stunning coastline, soak in the creative atmosphere and connect with like-minded individuals. By the end of the retreat, you'll have refined your skills and created artwork to treasure. Four lucky winners will each win a voucher towards an exciting getaway filled with creativity, learning and coastal charm.

Marilyn might be a familiar face from Channel 4's *Watercolour Challenge*. She is also a regular *Artists & illustrators* contributor. A loose impressionist painter, Marilyn catches light and movement in her artwork. You can discover video sessions that offer an overview of her tutorials on her website. There are also monthly and annual membership options for people looking for planned online lessons and painting-related content. To find out more, visit ***marilynallis.com*** □

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**This month's spotlight on a British Art Club member**

# We present...

## DIANE GRIFFITH

### This artist brings Cornwall's landscapes to life, blending texture, warmth and imagination

For many artists, the path to their craft comes through academia, galleries and mentorship, but The British Art Prize 2024 People's Choice winner Diane Griffith's journey took a refreshingly unconventional route. This Midlands-born artist – once entrenched in the London media world – made a leap to the Cornish coast. Since relocating to Newquay in 2017, Diane has been capturing Cornwall with a mix of acrylic, oil and enamel.

Reflecting on her early years, she recalls a disciplined approach to art. "At school, I was educated about line, form, light and shadow," she says, describing a structured environment that rewarded replication over imagination. Though she mastered the art of copying, the praise gradually waned. "People thought I was good, but I distinctly got the impression that 'good' wasn't enough anymore."

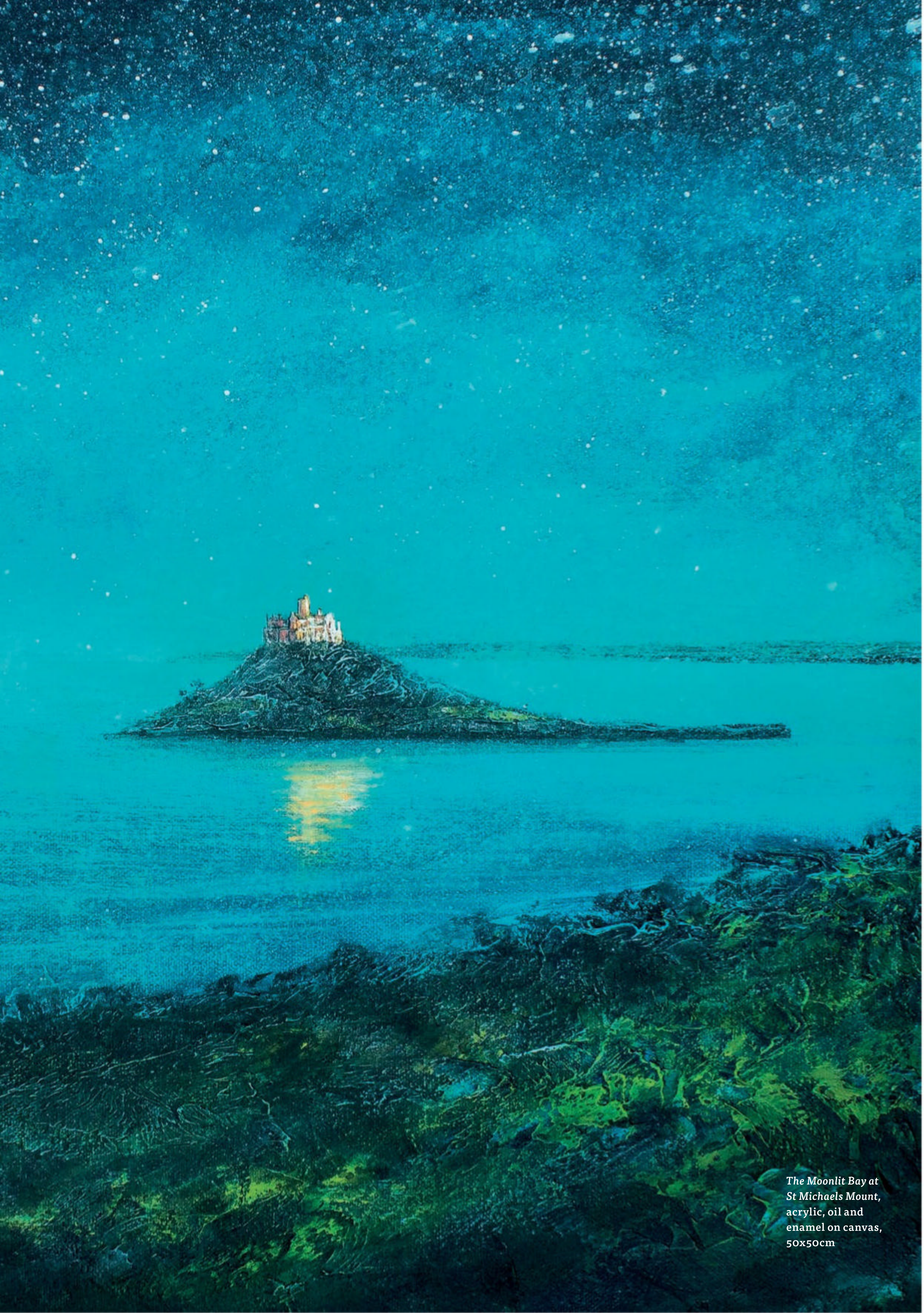
It wasn't until Diane left the metropolitan buzz that she reconnected with her passion for art. London, she explains, was a setting where buildings became rigid forms to navigate – a stark contrast to Cornwall's freeform landscapes. "Rural landscapes give you a lot more flexibility to get creative with how you put the paint down." Diane found inspiration in the region's sprawling coastlines and dramatic cliffs. The switch from the sharp lines of the cityscape to the flowing forms of coastal terrain brought her work an unmistakable energy.

Her process is both instinctual and meticulous, often beginning with a mental image sparked by everyday moments. She explains, "Creative ideas can hit at any time, a throw-away sentence or something you see on Instagram or TV can spark a nugget into a fully-fledged idea." But translating that spark into a painting is not without its challenges. "The hardest part for me," she admits, "is deciding when it's finished." Diane uses various tricks to distance herself from her work, including photographing it – a practice that allows her to evaluate the piece with fresh eyes, free from emotional attachment.

Cornwall's art community has also played a vital role in the artist's journey. As a member and Publicity Officer for the Newquay Society of Artists, she found camaraderie and validation. "It's a much-needed motivation that you are doing the right things and to keep going," she says. Another vital boost was winning last year's esteemed British Art Prize People's Choice Award.

Diane's success extends beyond Cornish shores, with her pieces now accessible to a global audience through her website. However, she remains candid about the challenges of online visibility. While physical spaces offer tangible engagement, online platforms require a balance of marketing and personal connection. "This all sounds great, but they have to find me first," she says, acknowledging the complexity of selling art in the digital world.

From her Midlands beginnings to her Cornish studio, Diane's journey embodies resilience, adaptability and a touch of coastal inspiration.
***britishartclub.co.uk/profile/handonart*** □



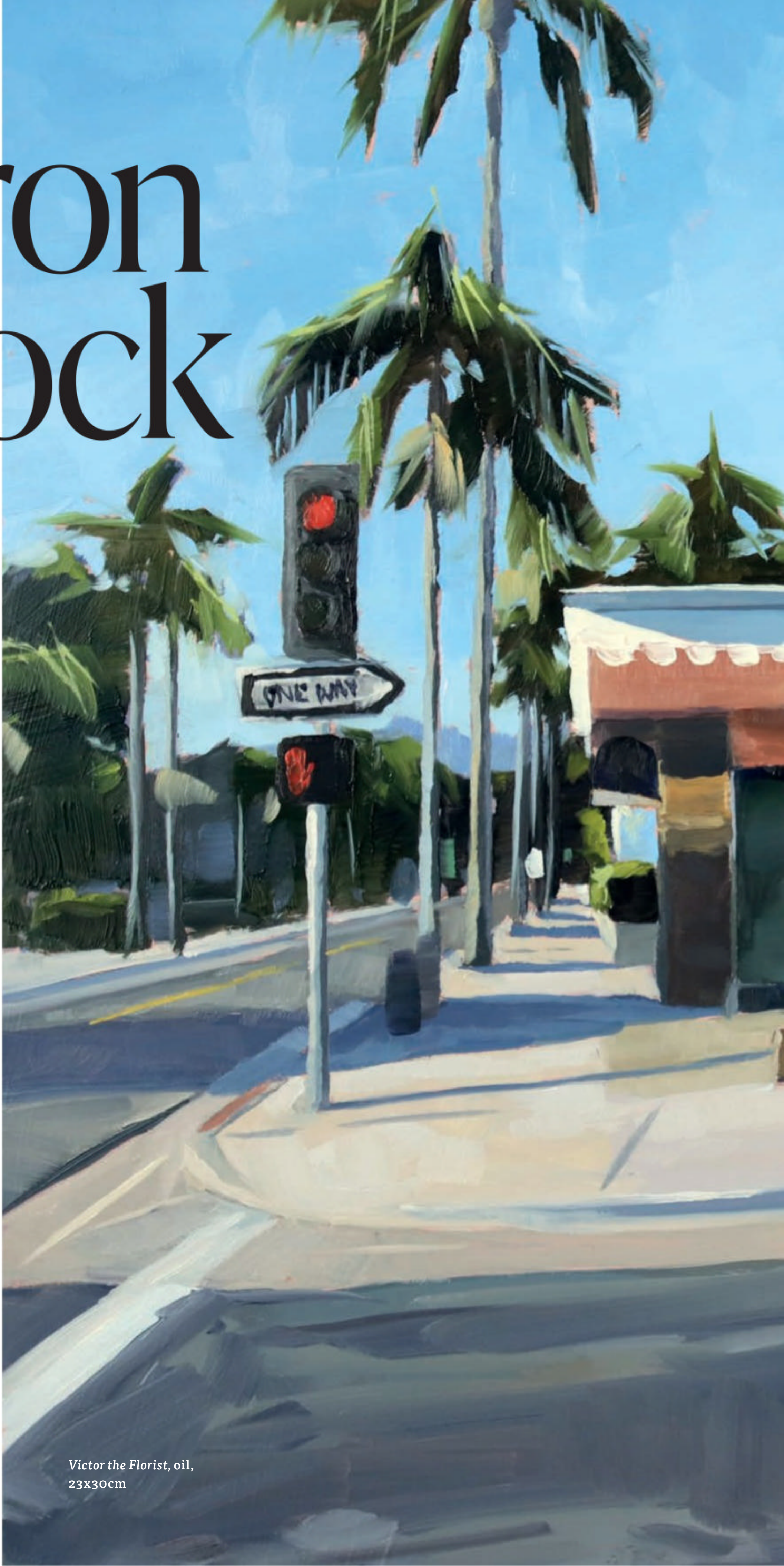
*The Moonlit Bay at St Michaels Mount,* acrylic, oil and enamel on canvas, 50x50cm

# Sharon Schock

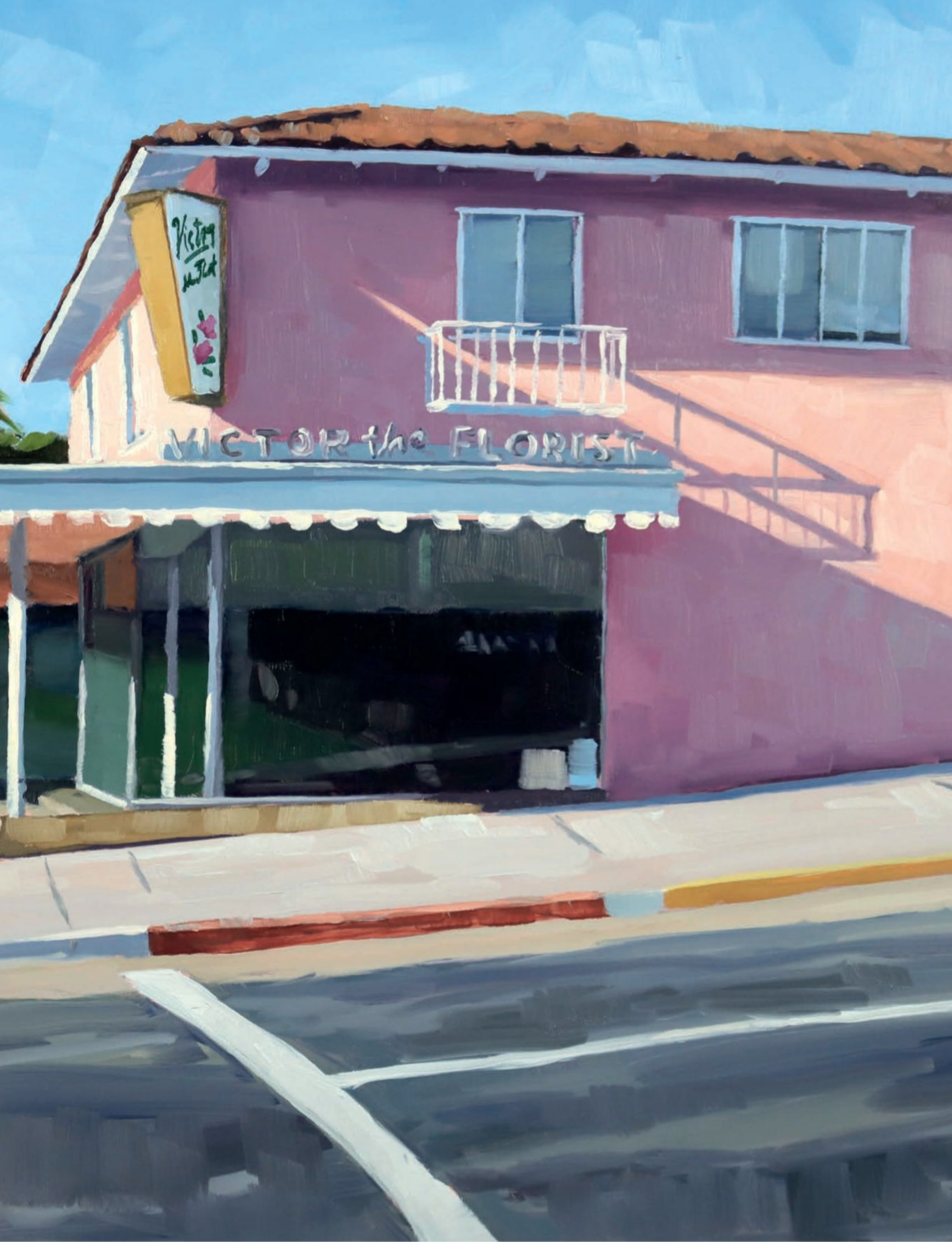
## This American artist paints *all prima*, with landscape work that makes you dream of California. *Sara Mumtaz* asks **SHARON SCHOCK** more about her practice

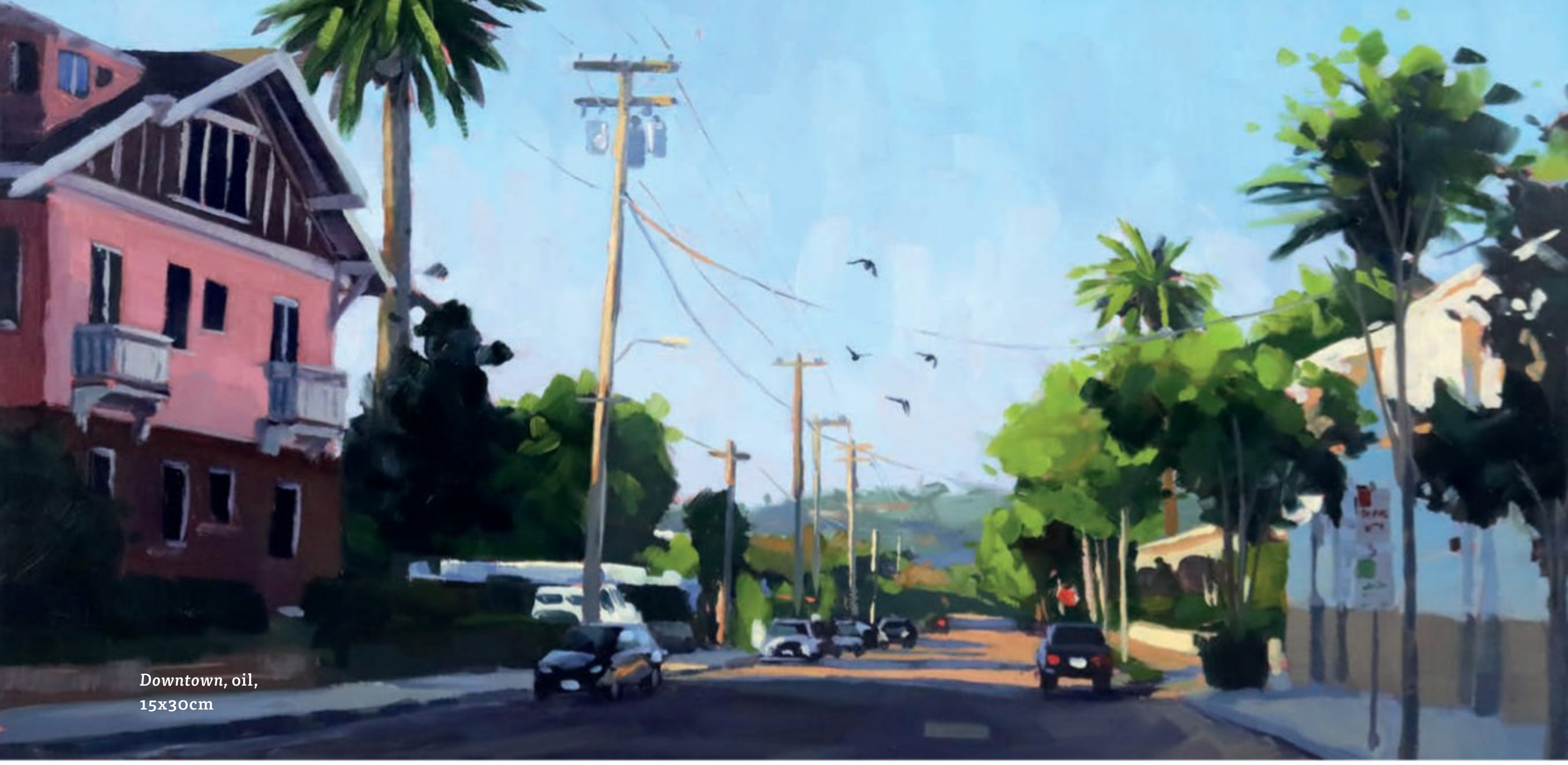
Hailing from the vibrant city of Santa Barbara, California, artist Sharon Schock is known for her loosely painted artwork. Her bold and colourful urban landscape paintings bring energy to her *alla prima* regimen. With a degree in Fine Arts from Westmont College, she explored various mediums and presented her senior project in digital painting. "I'm not sure what sparked my interest in art, but it's always been there," she reflects. From a young age, drawing and painting were her favourite pastimes. She recalls begging her mum for pads of blank paper from the shop.

Enrolled in weekly art classes from Year 1, she experimented with charcoal, pastels and eventually oils. As a child, her parents set up a home studio for her, encouraging her artistic growth from an early age. Today, her passion for urban and city landscapes is evident in her work, where lighting plays a crucial role. "I am so thankful for the area that I live in. Santa Barbara is such a colourful place and I'm constantly inspired by the beauty around me." She prefers her art to balance structure and detail while maintaining character through expressive brushstrokes. Living in a picturesque Californian neighbourhood with her husband, three children and a 17-year-old "fat" ▶

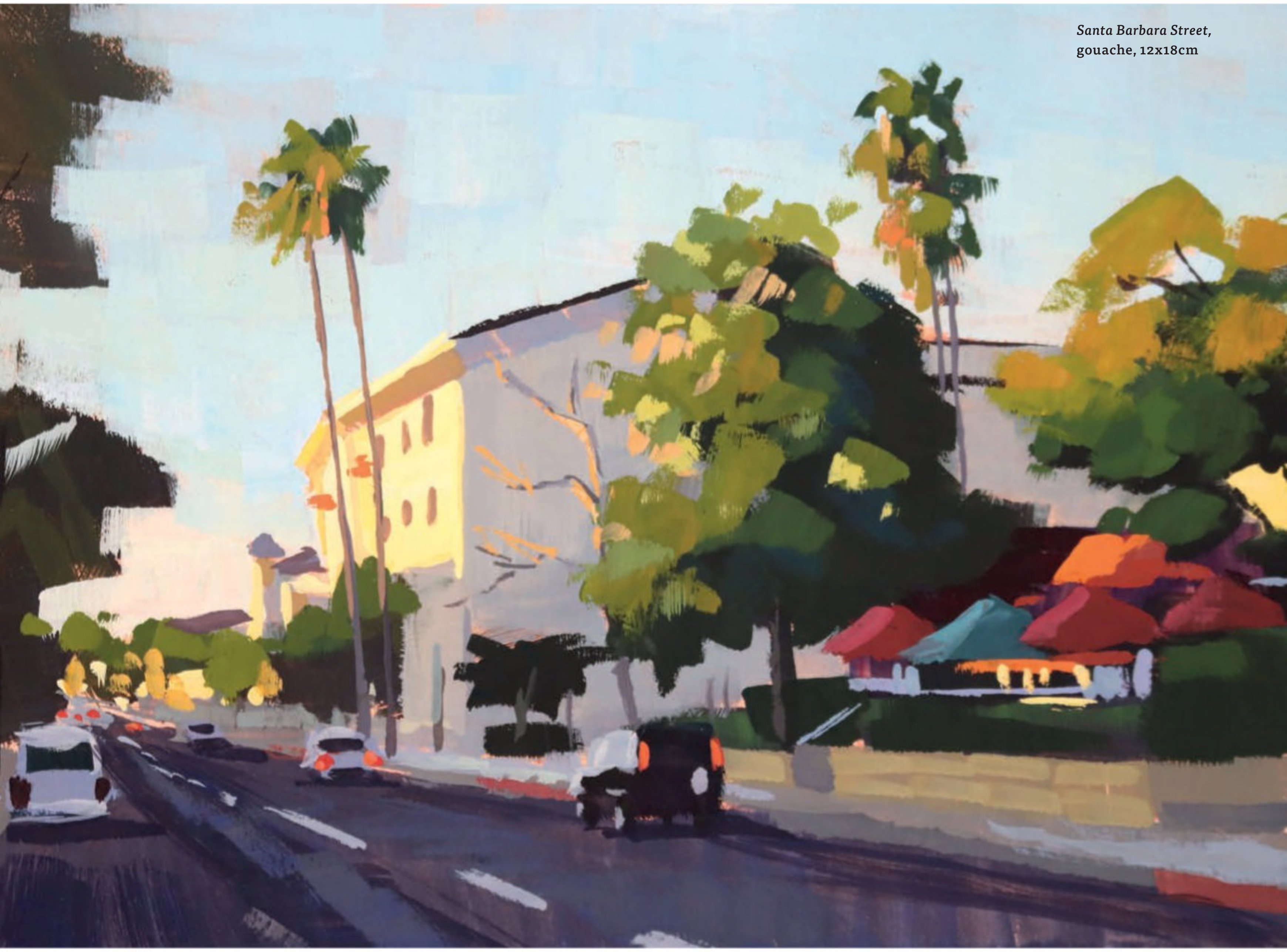


*Victor the Florist*, oil, 23x30cm

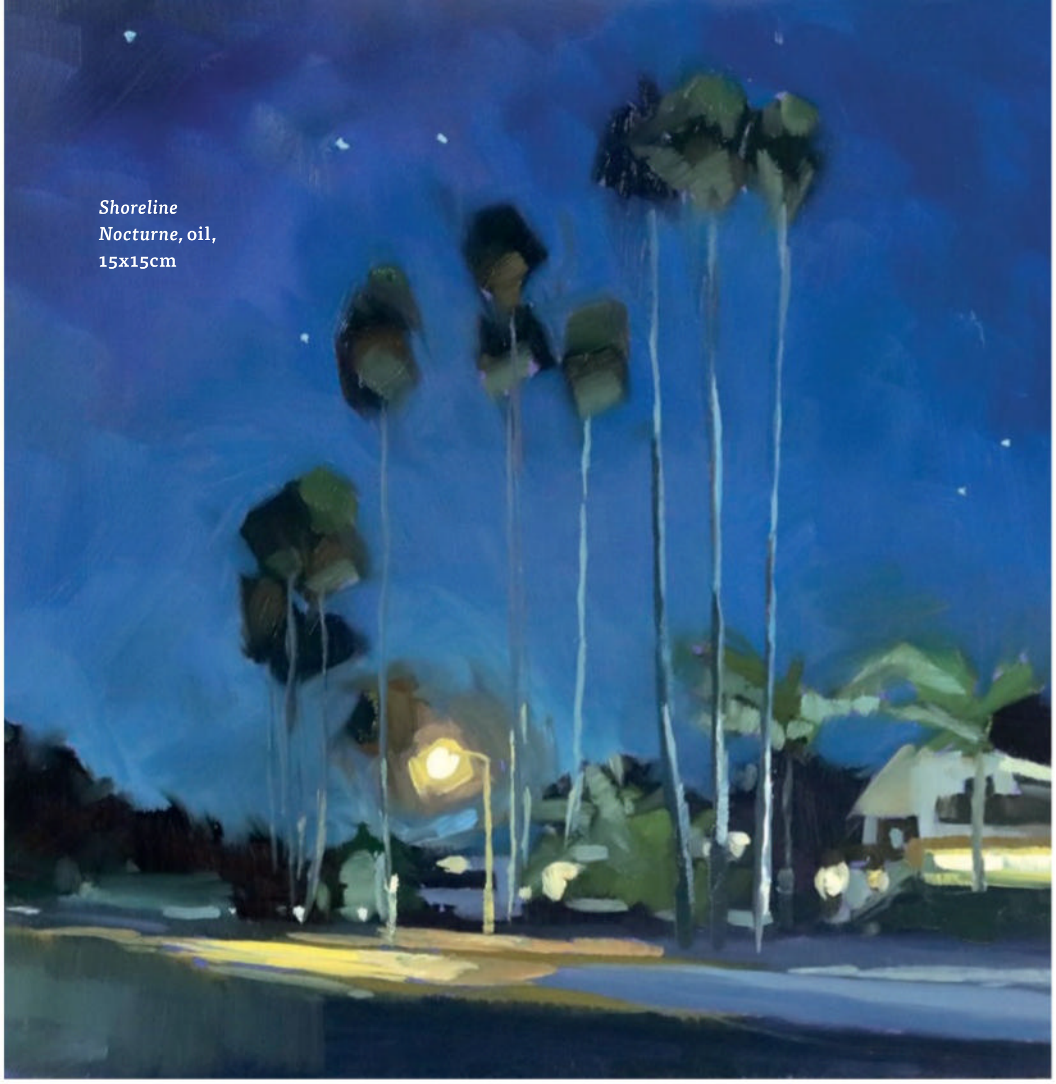

Victor
VICTOR the FLORIST



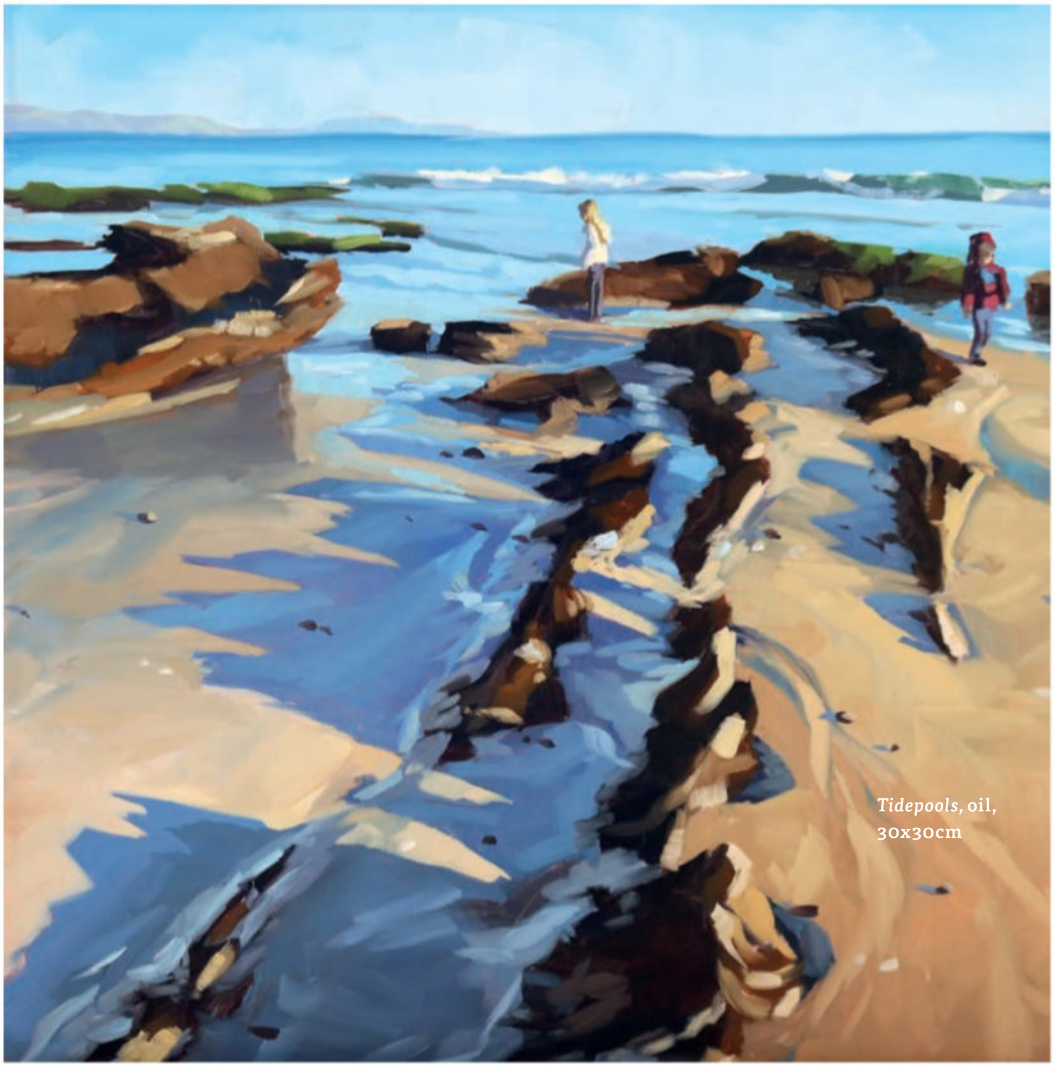
*Downtown*, oil, 15x30cm



*Santa Barbara Street*, gouache, 12x18cm



*Shoreline Nocturne*, oil, 15x15cm



*Tidepools*, oil, 30x30cm

orange cat named Charlie, she finds endless inspiration just outside her doorstep.

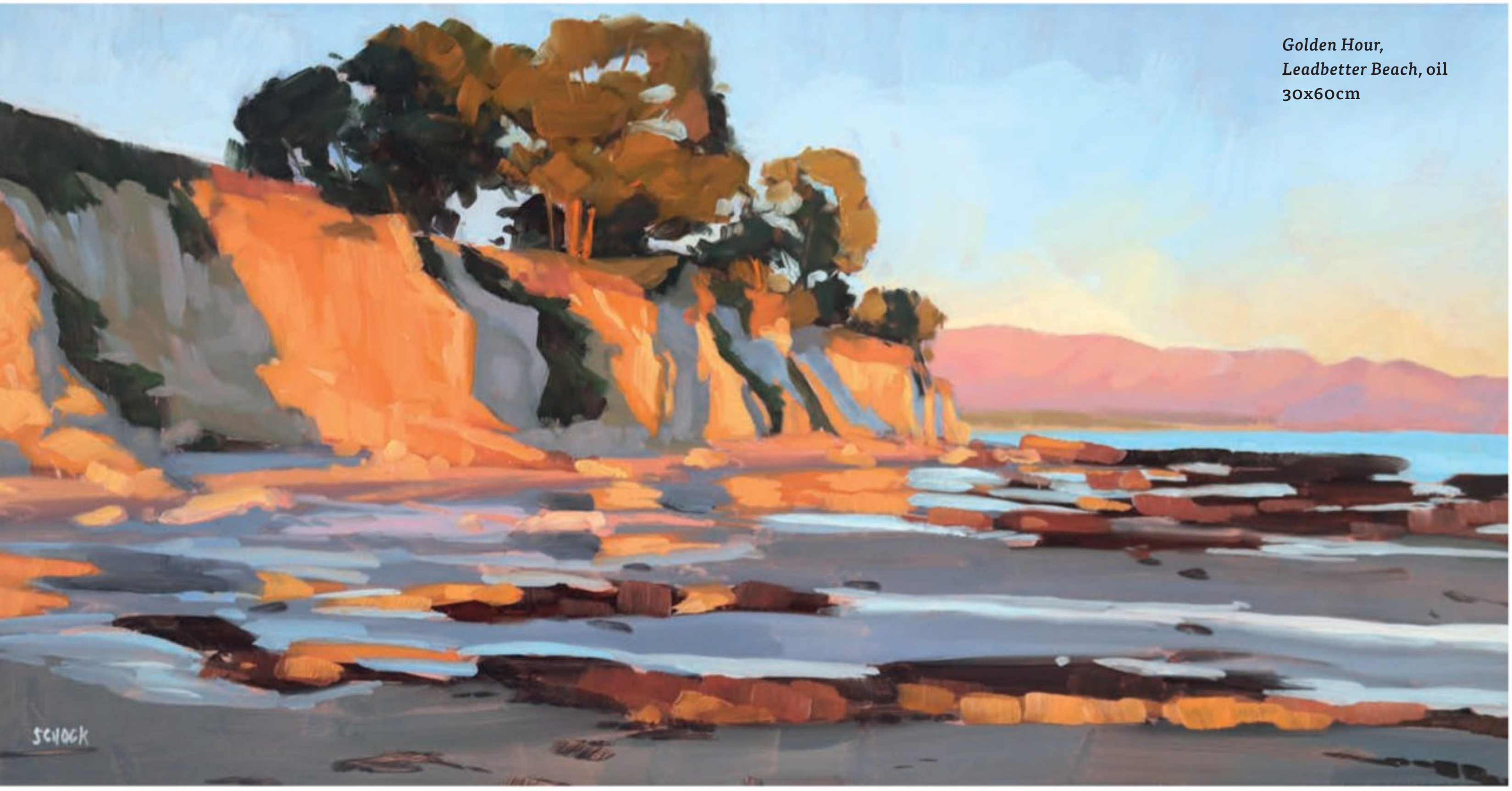
"For years, my studio space was in the garage, but I've since upgraded to a room next to it," she says with a smile. Though not perfect, she is grateful for the dedicated space. "Having a door on the studio and a space that's not competing with 'garage stuff' is helpful for the creative process," she laughs. Her small studio serves as an escape from daily routine, with paints and brushes always within reach. This accessibility allows her to work efficiently, even when time is scarce.

Sharon is selective about her presence on social media, maintaining a careful balance. She enjoys engaging with fellow artists, sharing insights about her process, palette choices and tools. Still, she dislikes the pressure to create trending content. "Social media has been really helpful in some ways, but it often feels like it takes more time than it's worth. I love sharing my work and seeing others, but I don't enjoy feeling like I have to play the algorithm game."

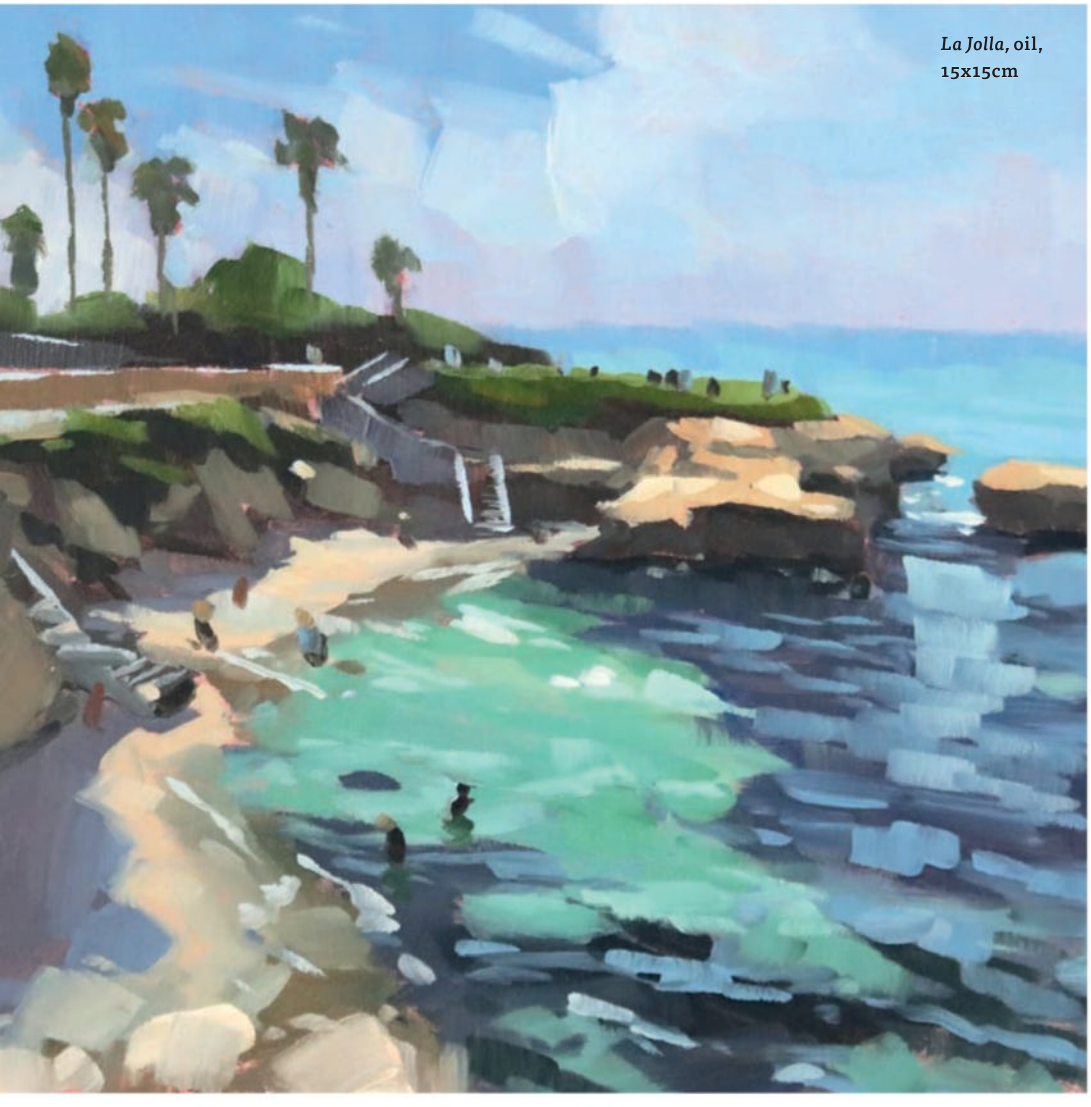
**"Changing mediums or adjusting my palette helps shake things up"**

Her education at Westmont College and the Denver Artists League provided opportunities to explore different mediums. "College broadened my horizons and introduced me to new techniques. My true passion is oil painting, but ironically, I wasn't able to explore it in college due to safety restrictions. The University were concerned about ventilation and fire safety as it was a rather old building. A few years after I graduated, they built a beautiful new art building and now students can use whatever medium they want." Instead she worked with acrylic, watercolour and digital art.

Surrounded by California's beaches, foothills and small towns, Sharon captures the region's charm in her work. Her approach to painting is methodical. She begins by refining composition using a cropping tool or viewfinder, followed by a greyscale sketch to simplify values. She tones her panel with acrylic paint before marking out shadow areas with Ultramarine Blue to maintain coolness in the darker sections. "I usually start with ▸



***Golden Hour, Leadbetter Beach*, oil 30x60cm**



***La Jolla*, oil, 15x15cm**

the sky; it helps set the scene for the rest of the painting." Working from dark to light, she saves the brightest areas for last, describing them as, "The icing on the cake."

Sharon's career has been shaped by her dedication to painting from life. Overcoming her initial discomfort with *en plein air* painting, she now finds it transformative. "For years, painting outdoors was something I dreaded; with people watching me, it was hard to focus, but I signed up for a week-long *en plein air* workshop and practised painting outside beforehand to prepare. Now, I enjoy it."

Juggling her art career with raising three children, including a toddler, has been one of her biggest challenges. "Finding time for the studio takes a lot of sacrifice. I know this is just a season and eventually, I'll have more time to create. For now, I squeeze in whatever time I can, even if it means sacrificing sleep." Creative blocks also come and go, but she has learned to embrace the cycle. "When I don't know what to paint, I remind myself it's temporary. Changing mediums or adjusting my palette helps shake things up, and getting outdoors to paint is always a great reset."

For emerging artists, Sharon advises: "Keep painting. You can only improve with practise. Don't worry about making things perfect. Take a course in business – it will make all the things outside the studio a little easier." ***sharonschock.com*** □

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## HOW I MAKE IT WORK

# Steve Caldwell

This artist shares his journey to creating anatomically precise portraits

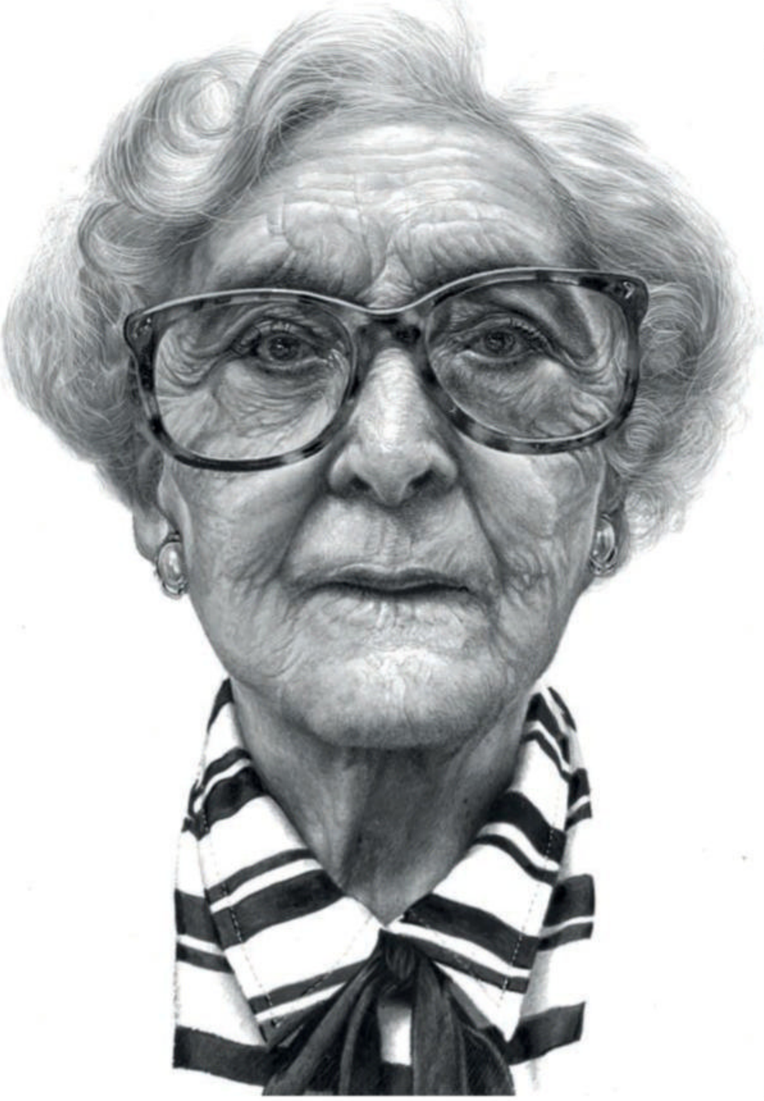
I was always drawing as a child, and my teacher and parents were supportive as long as it did not interfere with my schoolwork. My earliest inspiration came from the covers of novels I would borrow from our local library. I didn't have much access to galleries or fine art, so illustration and commercial art became a formative influence. My love of realist painting began when I attended an Arts Foundation course in my late teens at Wirral Metropolitan College. A course tutor introduced me to the works of Andrew Wyeth and Norman Rockwell, and I experienced a lightbulb moment. Making a painting that felt real and truthful became an obsession. The course also included life drawing classes which I took full advantage of.

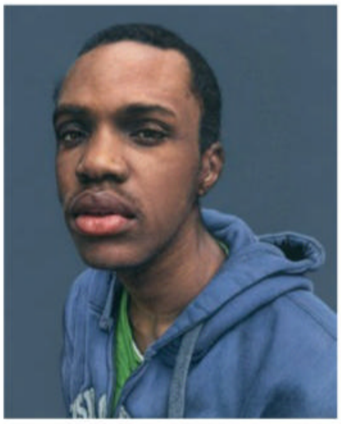
My path to becoming a full-time artist seemed inevitable as I simply wasn't interested in pursuing any other career. I studied medical illustration at art college as I was fascinated by anatomically correct figurative painting. This helped me greatly in my early illustration career as realism was much in vogue in the 1990s. When I joined a London illustration agency in 1994, I was sure I was on the right path. However, by 2012, I decided to concentrate on traditional portrait painting as most contemporary illustration had become digitised. I have been able to apply my training as a medical artist to portraiture. I remained fascinated by anatomical detail and used a combination of life sittings and photography to create a heightened sense of realism.

Many artists I admire use social media; it can be educational and entertaining to see what paintings they are working on. I have made friends and generated sales through Instagram, although I concentrate far more on the creative than the business side of art. Without the painting, there would be no business. Working as a full-time painter is an up-and-down way to make a living so I strive to be organised regarding deadlines and accounts. I don't always navigate this path successfully, but I try to be equally prepared for both busy and lean times.

The highlight of my career was the first time I exhibited with the Royal Society of Portrait Painters. I hadn't been painting portraits for very long at that point and the experience gave me both confidence and encouragement.

***Instagram: @stevecldwll*** □





**TOP** *June*, acrylic on wood, 15x12cm
**ABOVE** *O24*, acrylic on clayboard, 35x25cm

### STEVE'S TIPS FOR BECOMING A FULL-TIME ARTIST

1

**Look at all kinds of art**
I paint in a very specific way, but inspiration can come from unexpected places.

2

**Attend a life drawing class**
Drawing the figure from life has been the most useful educational tool for me.

3

**Have fun**
Take painting seriously, but not so much that it stops being enjoyable.

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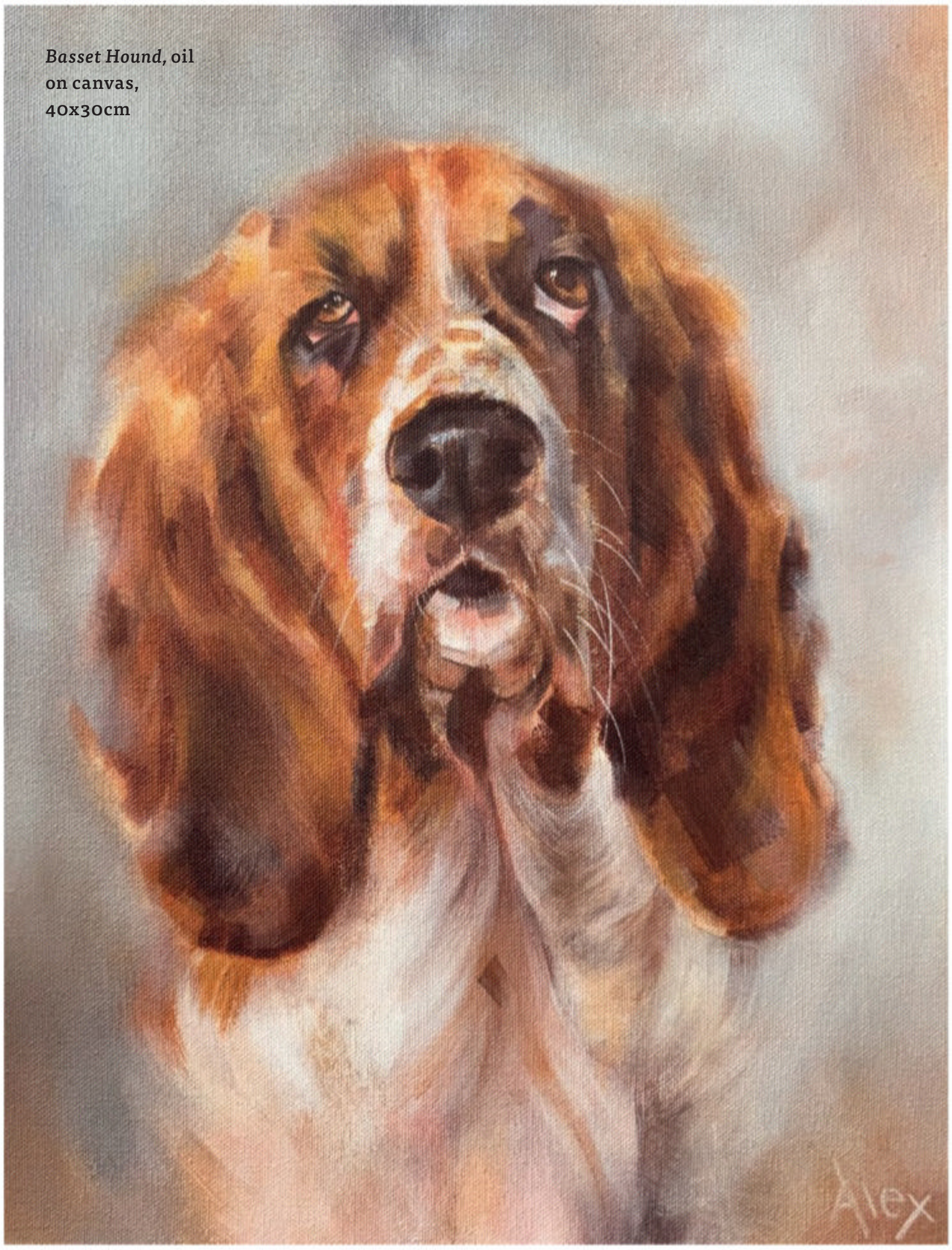
# Alex Goddard

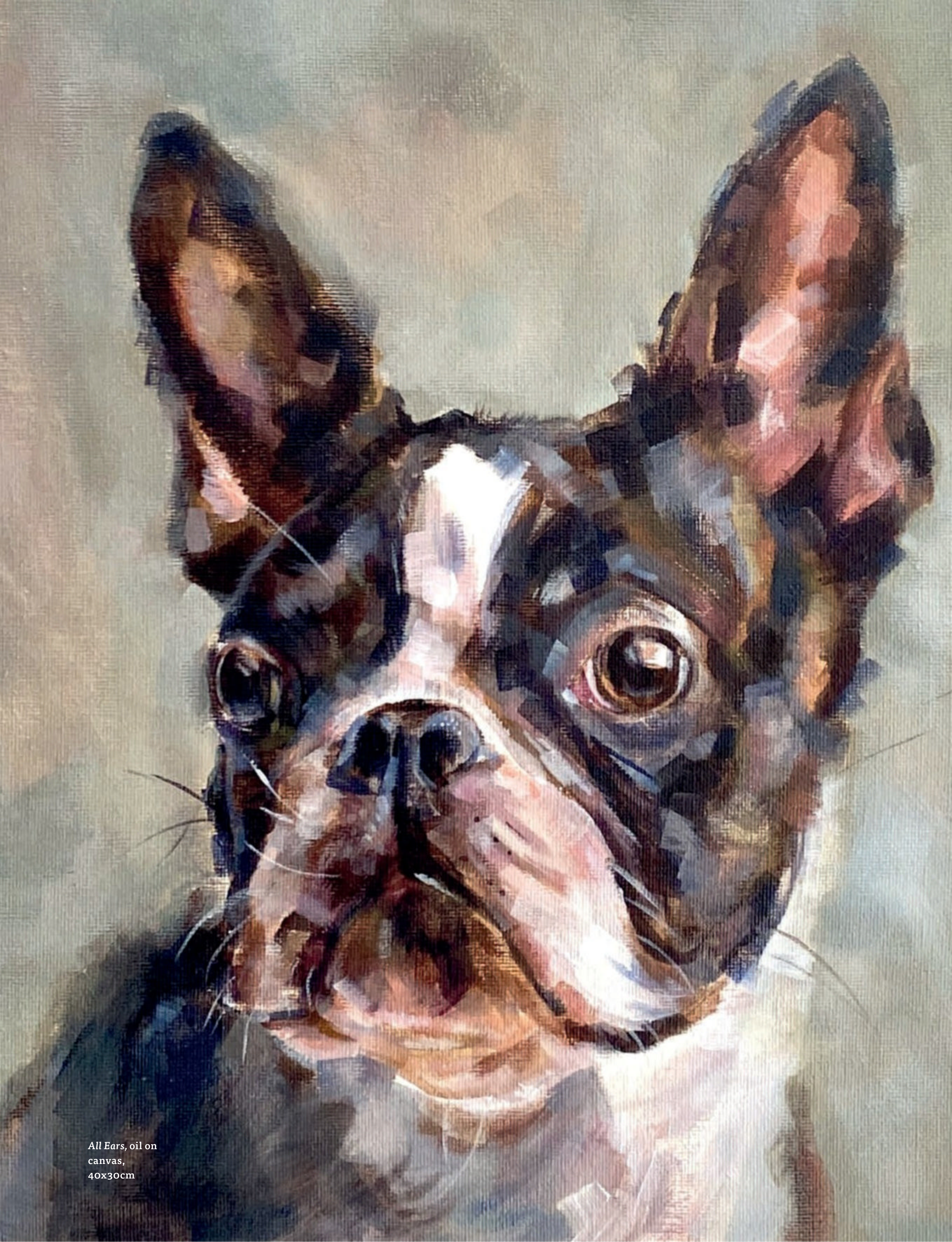
Whilst pregnant with her first child, this artist decided to paint a portrait of her brother's Boxer dog. Seven years later, she is now a successful pet portrait artist. She tells *Niki Browes* how she did it


*Basset Hound*, oil on canvas, 40x30cm

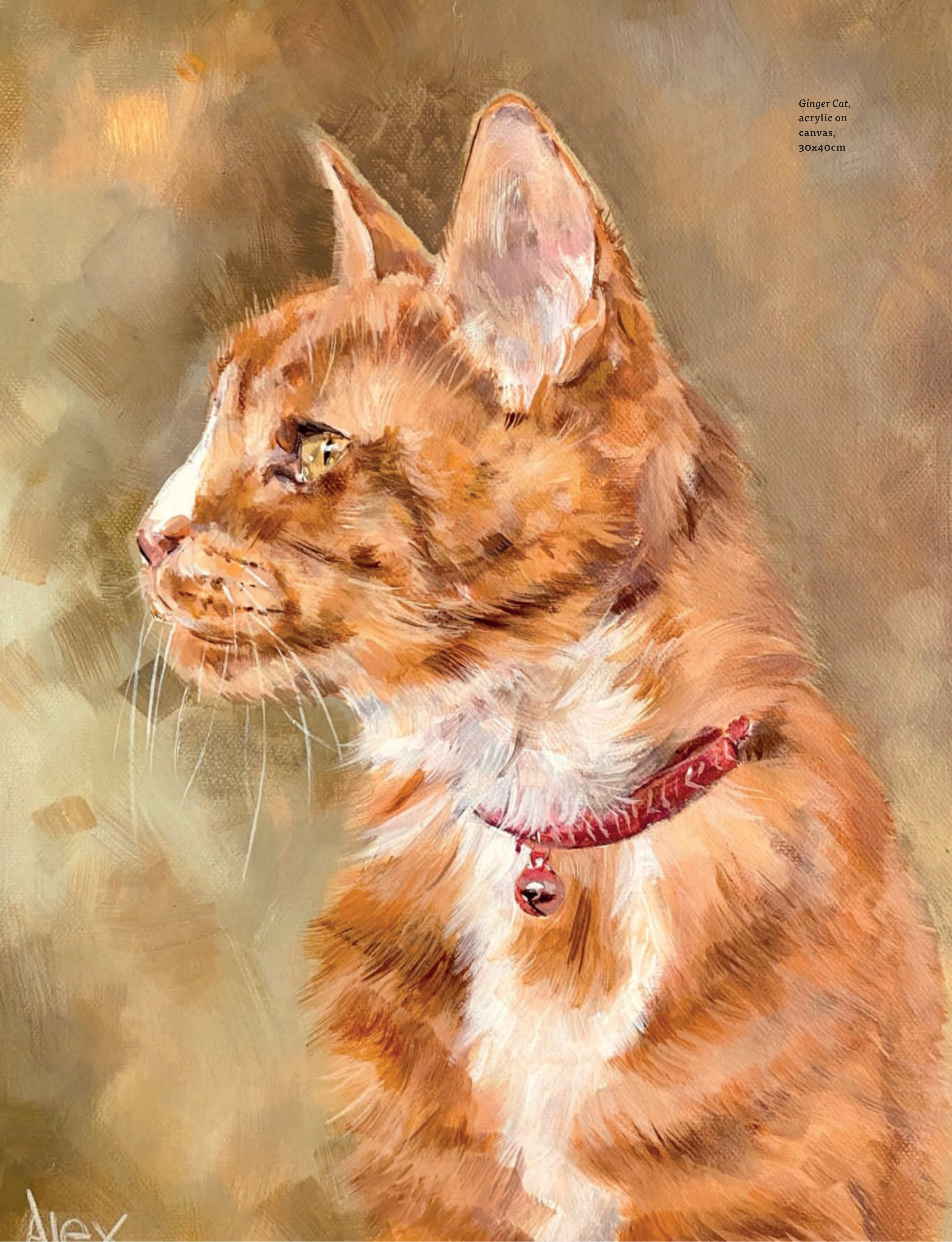
THIS ARTIST IS A GENUINE CHANGE MAKER in how she shares her content and advice, giving other artists the chance to plug into her network and learn about marketing themselves, which many find unnatural. The secret? It's all about practise. Since starting out seven years ago, her social media channels along with a YouTube network and her fantastic art, has propelled her business. It's an inspiring story for anyone wishing to explore and make it as a professional artist. ***alexgoddardart.com***

**I absolutely love experimenting with different mediums, but when it comes to commissions, I tend to stick to acrylic paint.**
It helps me maintain consistency in both the look and feel of the artwork, plus it makes things easier when it comes to drying time and keeping the pricing straightforward. Lately, though, I've been having a bit of a love affair with oil paints. They're a challenge to get used to – the drying times and the fact that you can't just use water in the process took a bit of adjusting too. But once you get the hang of it, they're just magical; so soft, buttery and with a depth of colour that's second to none. I also like to have a little play with watercolours from time to time; they're perfect for quick studies in my sketchbook.

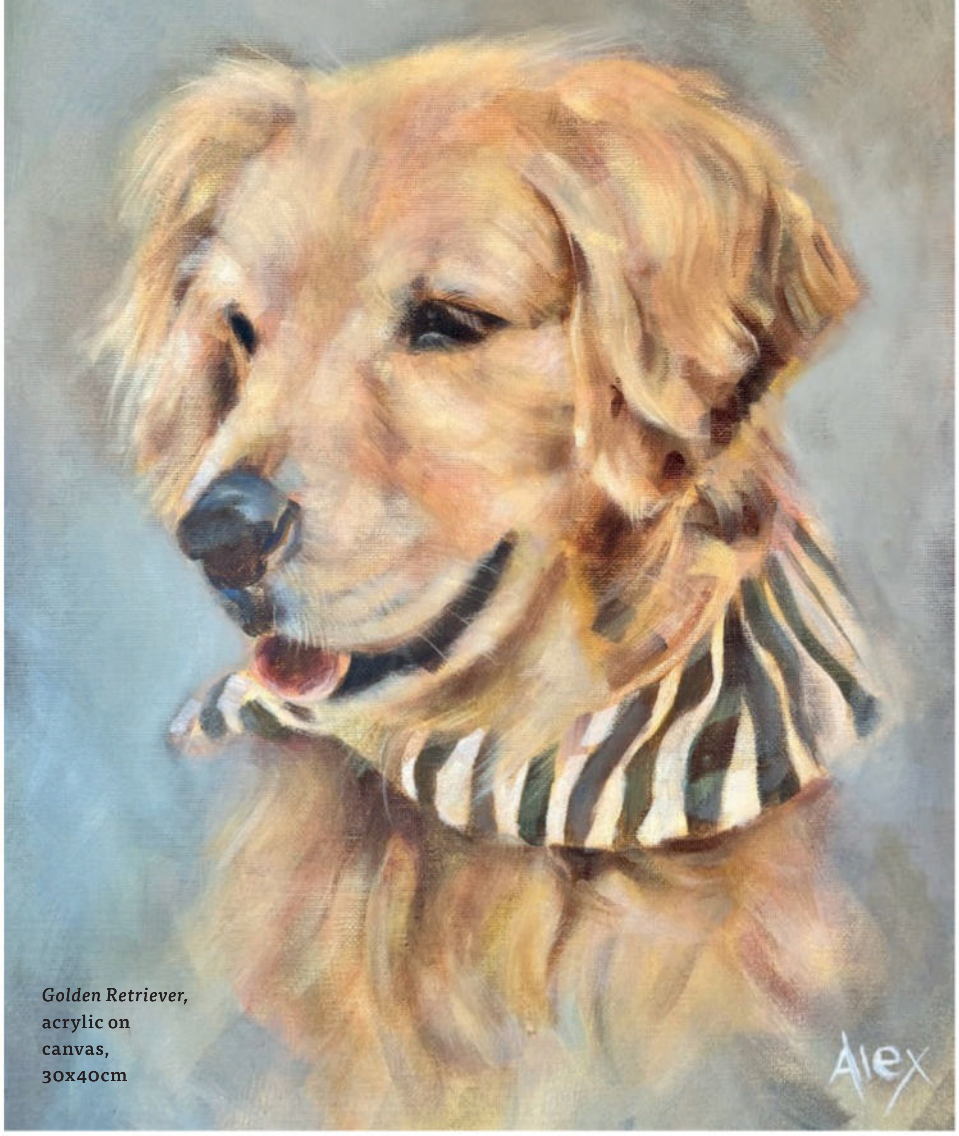
**I studied Fine Art at A level but, after finishing school, I chose a different path.**
I decided to go with Geography at university, which eventually led me to a career as an Environmental Advisor, working with corporate companies in London. While my ▸



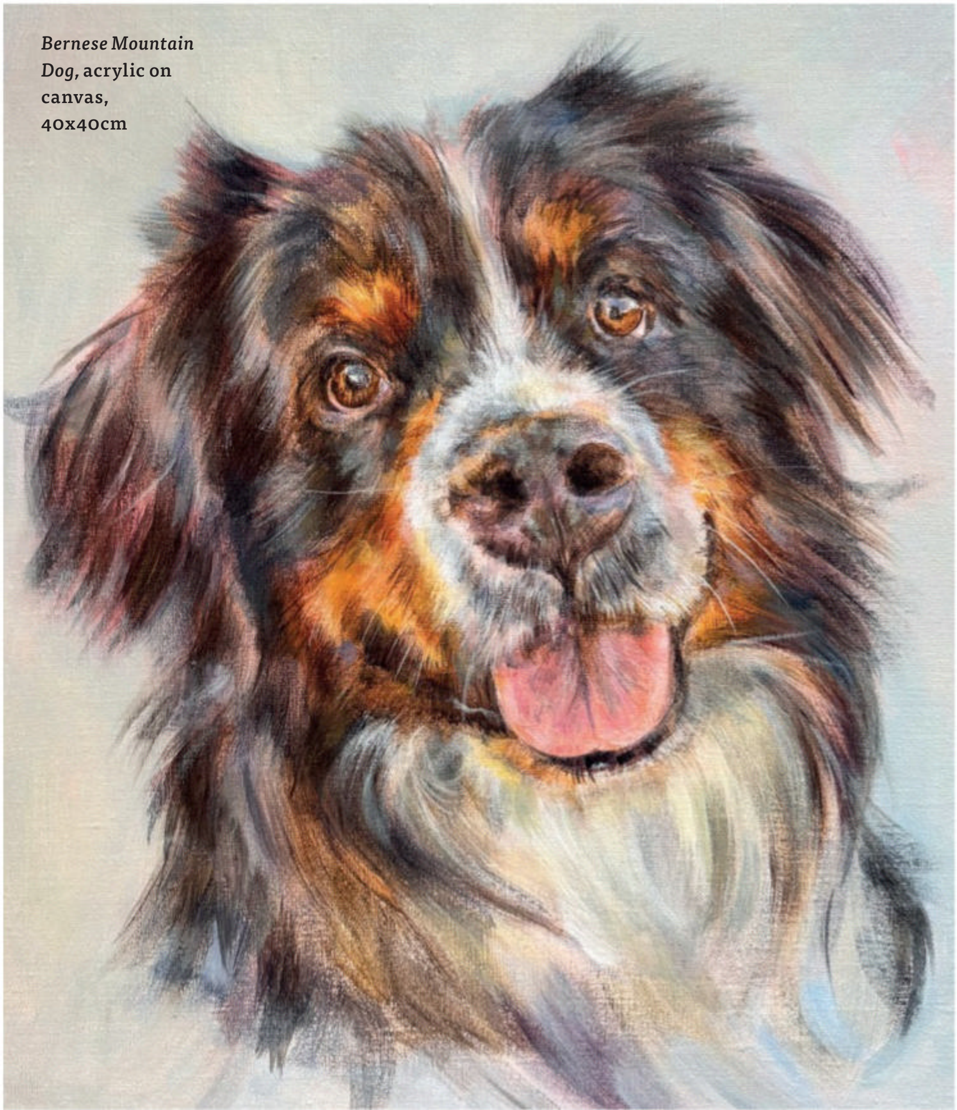
*All Ears*, oil on canvas, 40x30cm



*Ginger Cat*, acrylic on canvas, 30x40cm



*Golden Retriever*, acrylic on canvas, 30x40cm



*Bernese Mountain Dog*, acrylic on canvas, 40x40cm

professional life took a more analytical direction, my passion for creativity never went away. Art has always been a hobby of mine and I've found ways to keep it alive, whether that was taking sketchbooks with me on holidays or spending time painting at my kitchen table after work. It's something I've always done for fun, and it's a way for me to unwind and express myself.

**Affiliate marketing is a fantastic way to earn passive income by promoting products or services you genuinely believe in.**
Anyone can get involved, provided they have an online audience to share their recommendations with. I signed up for a couple of affiliate programmes with brands I trusted and used regularly, which made it easy to recommend their products authentically. Once I was approved for these programmes, I began incorporating affiliate links into my content, including blog posts and YouTube videos. The key is offering value to your audience while naturally weaving in product recommendations. For me it's not about hard selling, but rather about sharing things that I genuinely believe will benefit my followers. This approach helps build trust and ensures that my recommendations feel genuine and helpful.

**I do market myself in front of the camera.**
But honestly? I'm no natural. The opposite! It's all about practise. Just like with art, the more you do it, the better you get. When I look back at some of the first videos I made, I can really see how much I've improved in such a short time. There's still plenty I can work on, but I'm confident that, with time, I'll keep fine-tuning what needs improving. And if you love it, it never really feels like hard work. Give it a go.

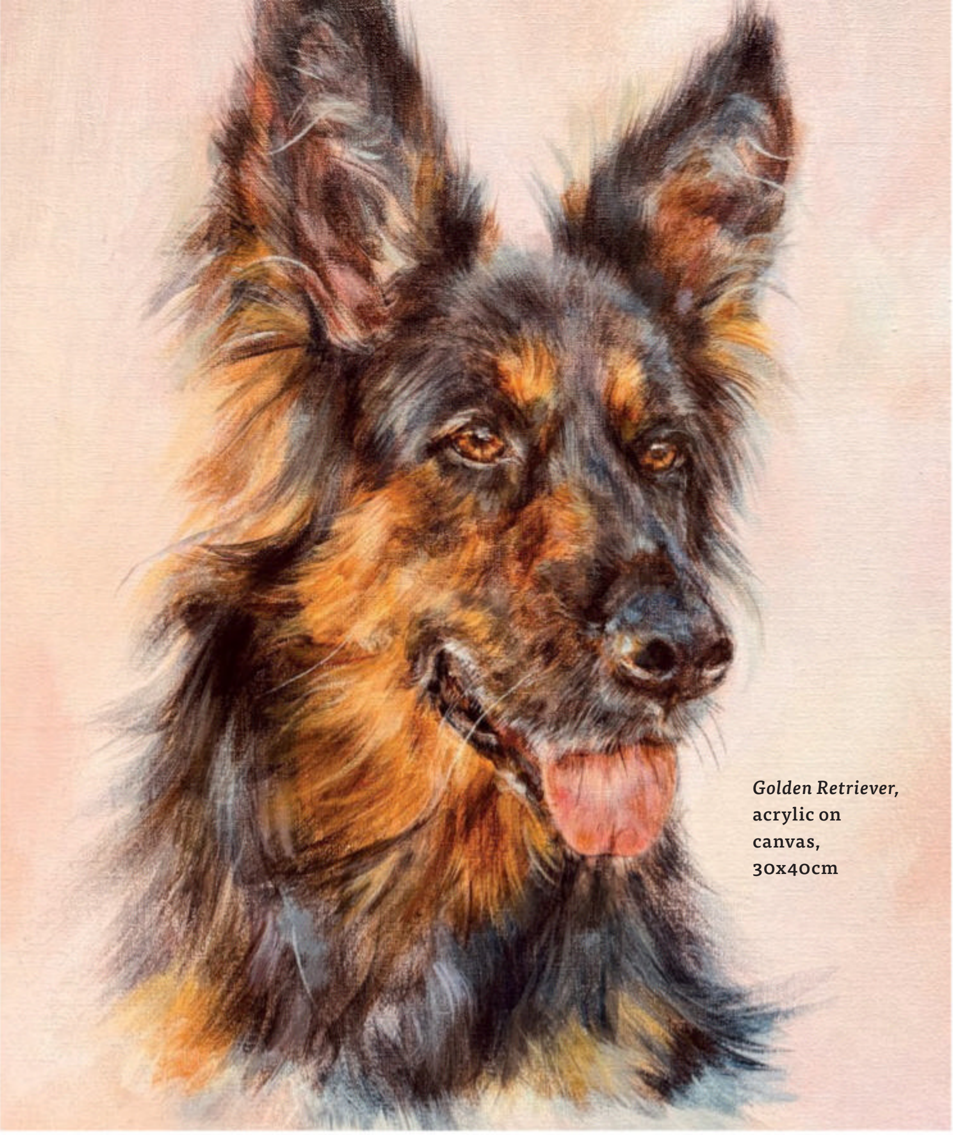
**So far, I've attended four craft markets and art fairs.**
I'm a member of the Horsham Artist Group, which hosts an annual Christmas Art Fair in Horsham town centre. I've also participated in a dog festival in the heart of the New Forest and the Floral Fringe Fair in West Sussex. Additionally, I took part in one of the craft and gift fairs organised by the well-known Mynt Market, who run events across Southern England. Some of these events were more successful than others, but my top tip would be to do your research and pick ones where your target audience is likely to turn up, as well as those with good footfall. If it's an outdoor market, remember that the weather can really impact how busy it gets. ▶

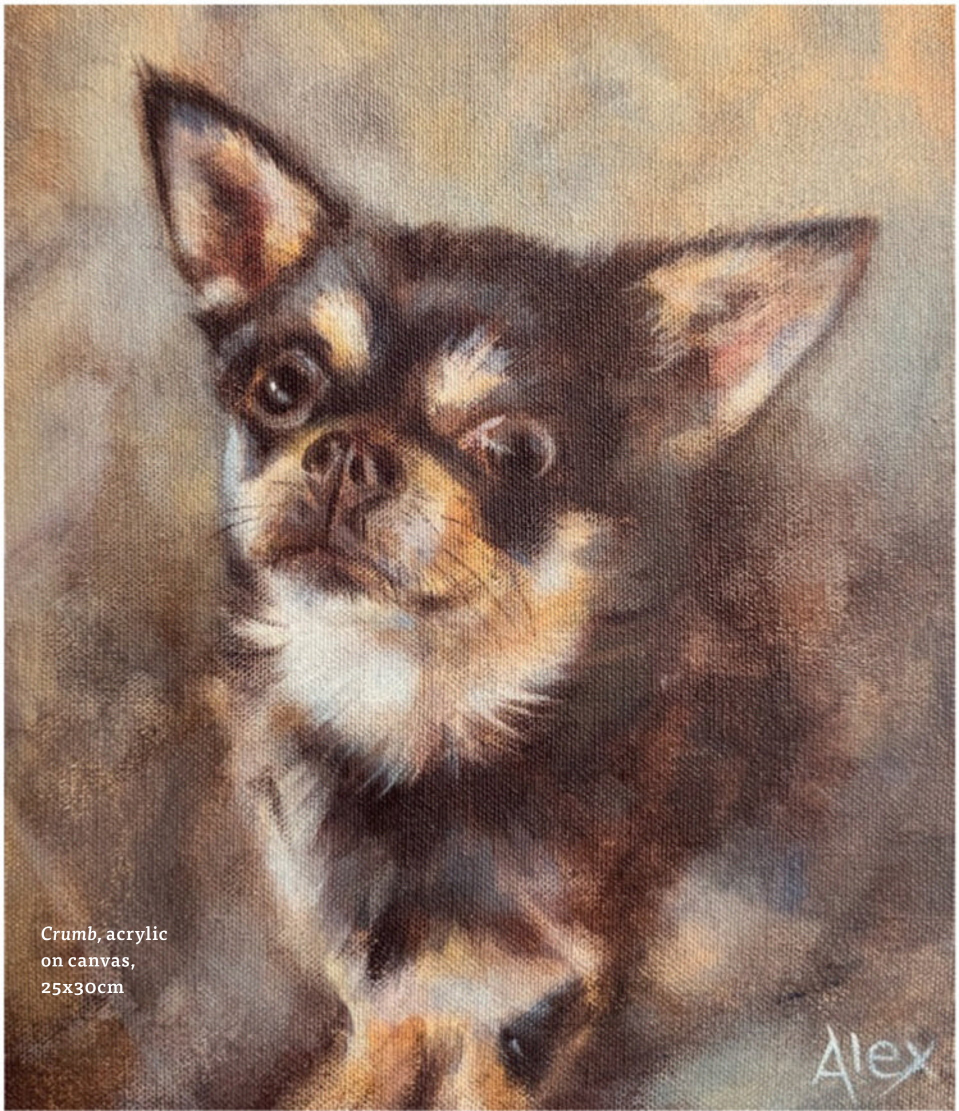
**These markets are a great opportunity for me to promote my pet portrait commissions.**
I bring along a mix of framed and unframed sample paintings so potential clients can take a close look. I also make sure I take lots of flyers and business cards to hand out and give people the opportunity to meet me and learn more about the commission process. Recently, I've started making greeting cards and bookmarks from my artwork, which I sell at the fairs as well. Offering these lower-priced items works really well, as many people come to these events for a quick impulse buy. It's nice to have some more affordable options available for them to enjoy too.

**I really enjoy these events because they're a fantastic way to market myself.**
Being able to chat to people face-to-face helps build trust and shows transparency in what I do and what I offer. It's also great to hear the kinds of questions people have; not just about the commission process, but also about how I paint and my background. Plus, it's lovely to meet and connect with other stallholders. I love hearing their stories and learning about their experiences at other markets they've attended. It's always inspiring.

**As a pet portrait artist, inspiration is never in short supply.**
This year, though, I want to focus more on creating original pieces, so I'm limiting my portrait commissions to just one or two a month to make more time for my own work. I only recently read *Steal Like an Artist* by Austin Kleon, and it was an absolute gem. There are so many nuggets of wisdom in this book that I'm putting into practice in my everyday life as an artist. It's really been helping me stay focused and inspired.

**My clients often tell me it's about capturing that special feeling of the bond between them and their pets.**
I know it can be really emotional for owners, especially with memorial portraits, so my mission is always to create something truly unique and special to honour that connection. When people commission a painting, I love to ask about their pet's nature and any little personality quirks or stories they want to share. It really helps me when I'm painting, especially when it comes to picking the right background colour. Every single day, I get to add a little something that brings me closer to my goals. What I love most is that, even though I work hard, it often doesn't feel like work at all. I can't wait to see where it takes me. ◻


*Golden Retriever*, acrylic on canvas, 30x40cm



*Crumb*, acrylic on canvas, 25x30cm

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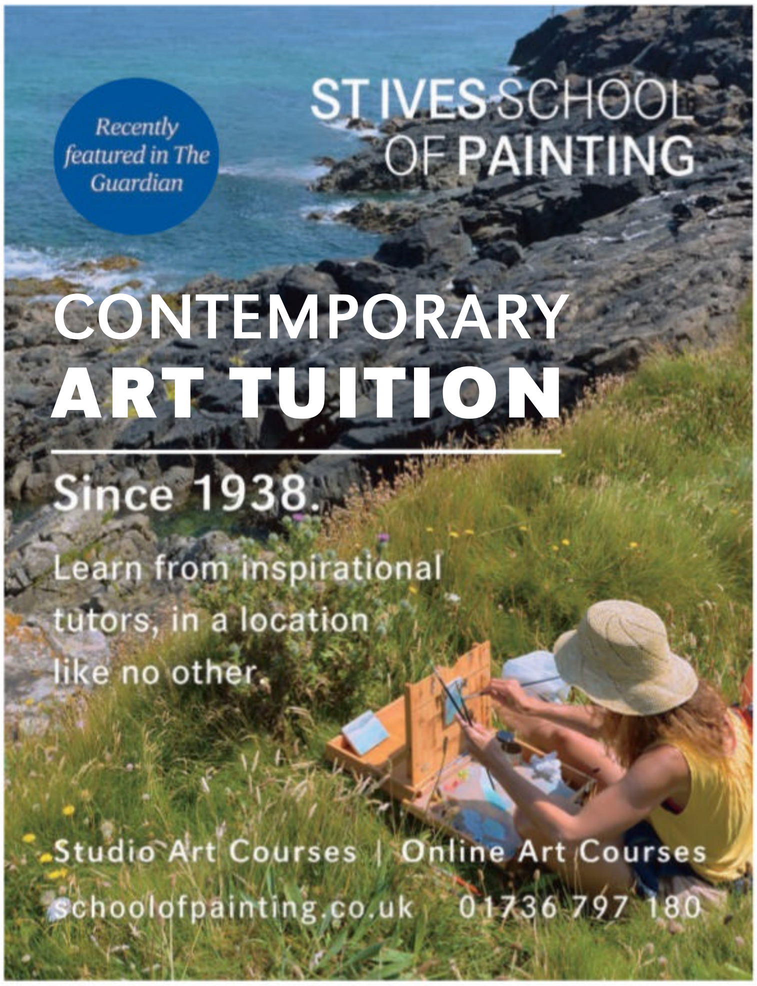

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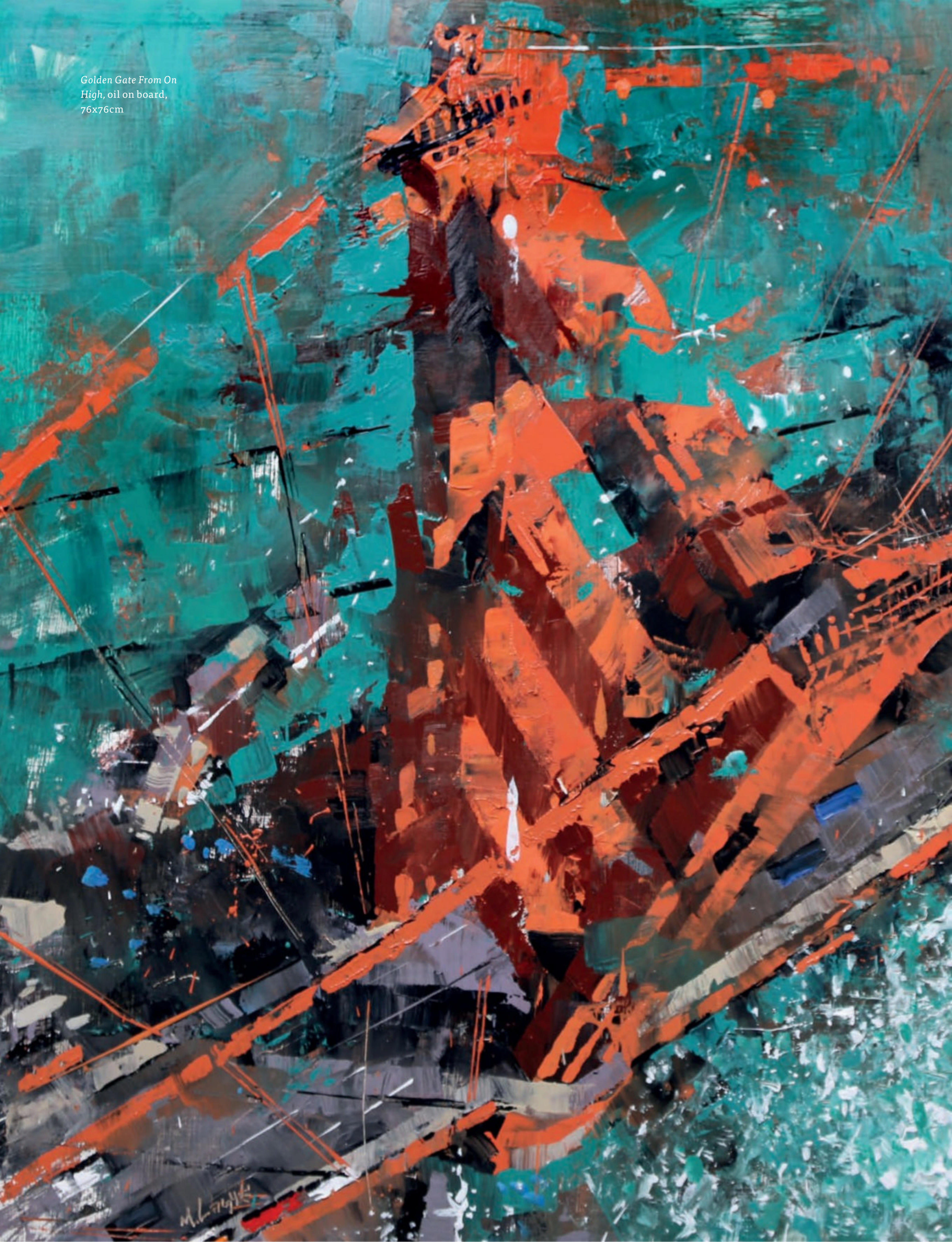
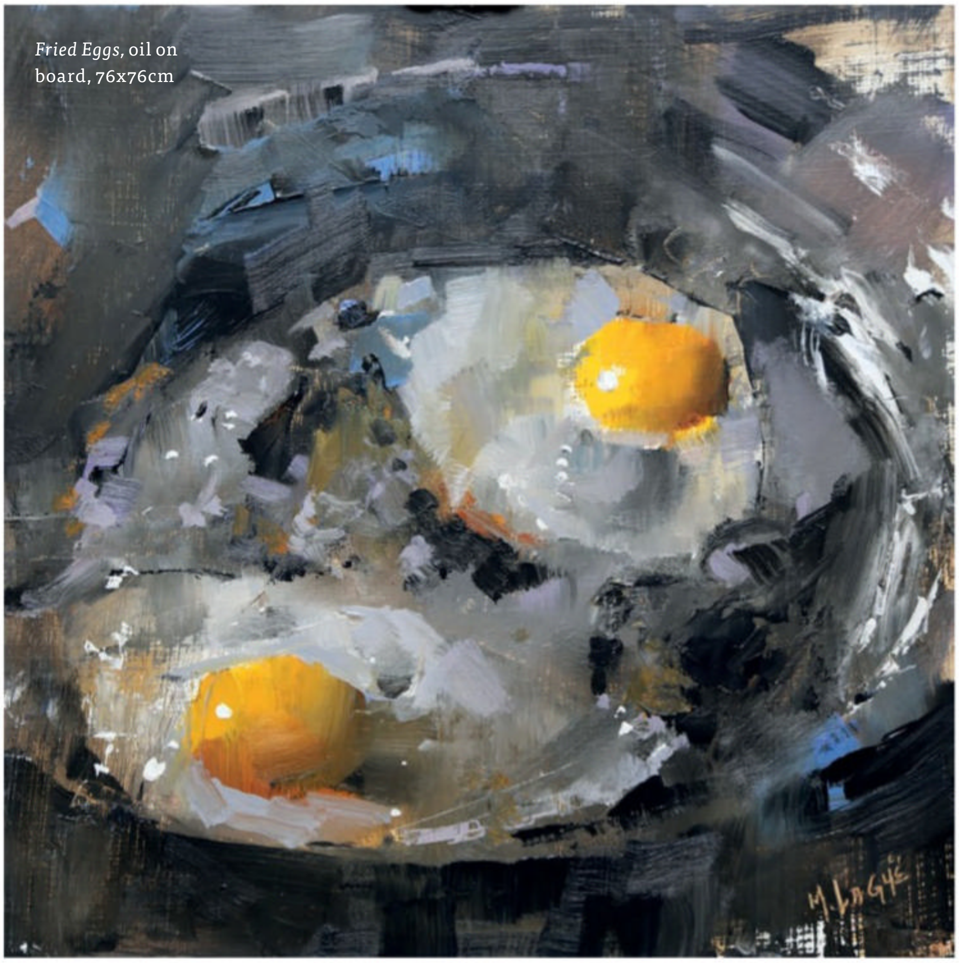


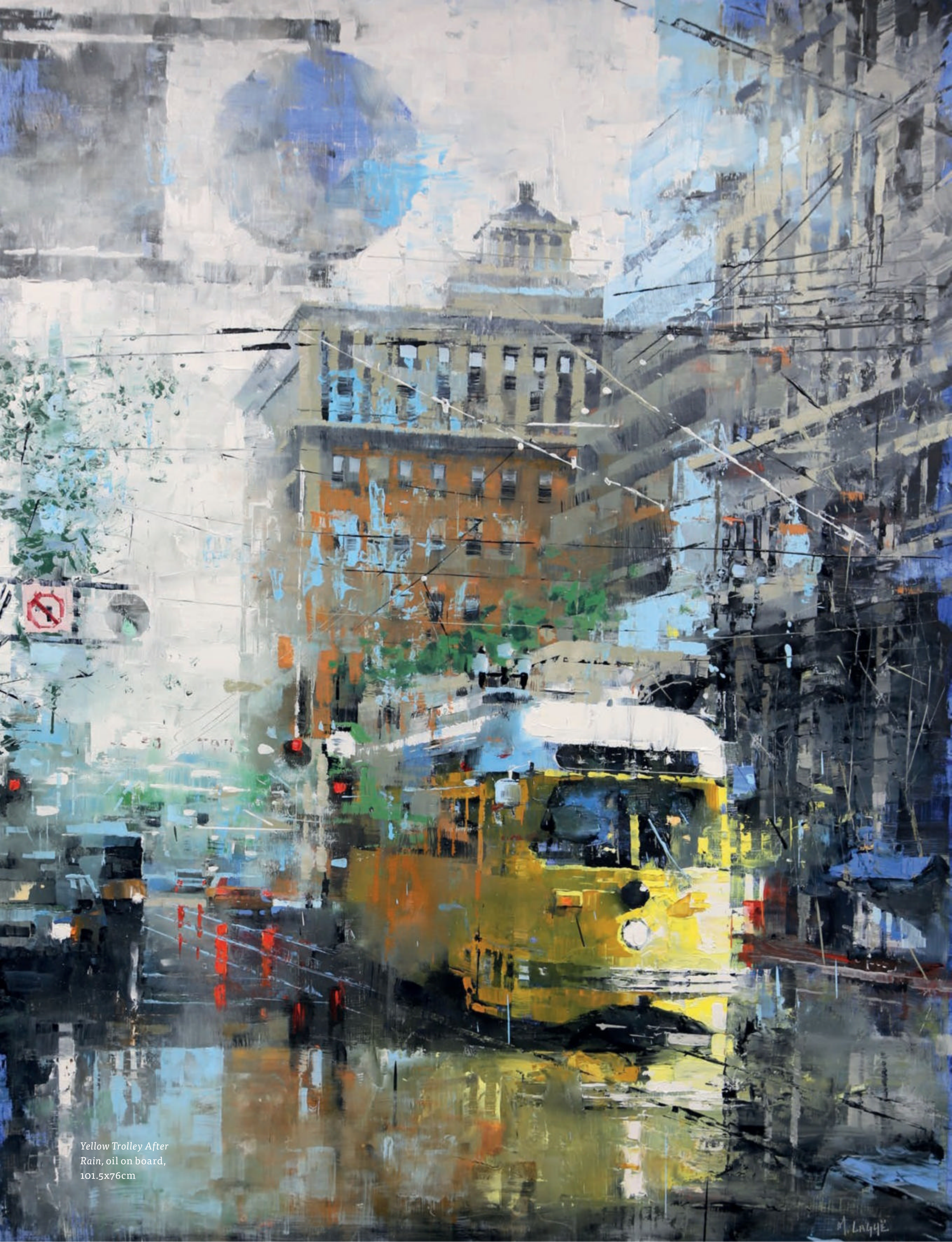
*Golden Gate From On High*, oil on board, 76x76cm

# Mark Laguë

This artist has developed an international reputation and won numerous awards, both in his native Canada and in the United States. *Sarah Edghill* finds out more ▶



*Fried Eggs*, oil on board, 76x76cm



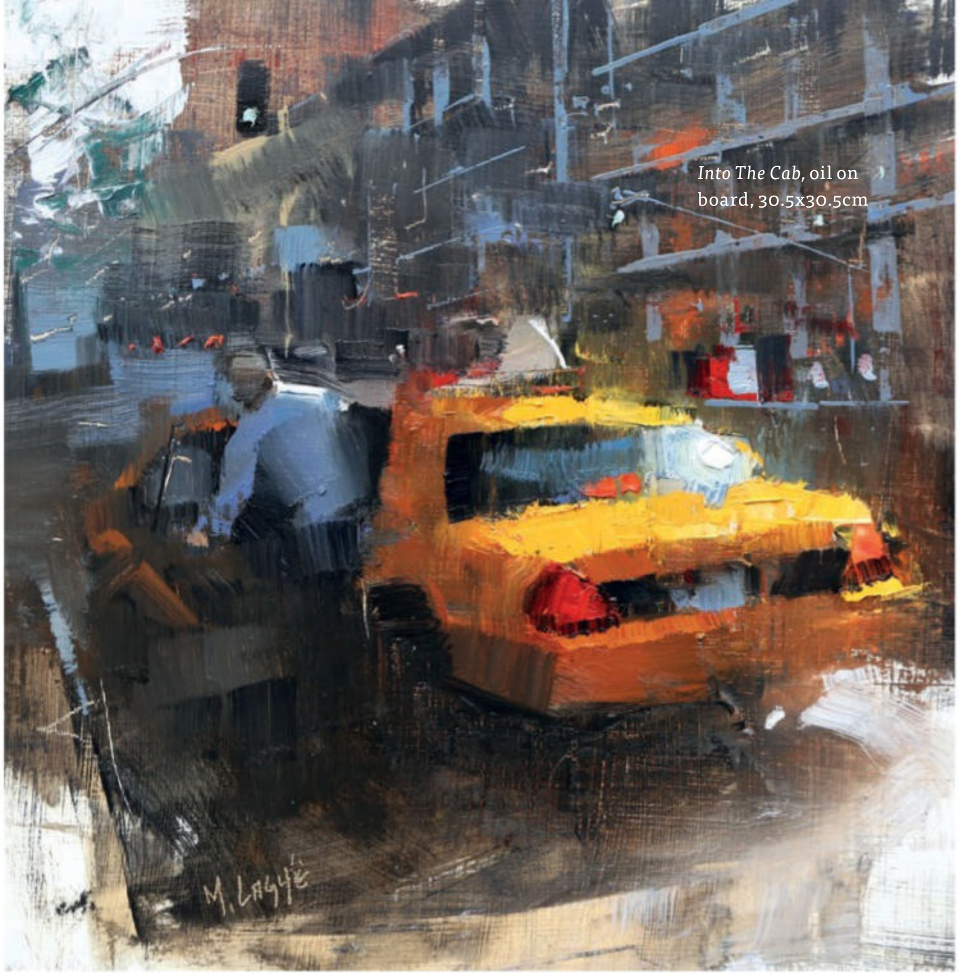
*Yellow Trolley After Rain*, oil on board, 101.5x76cm

Mark Laguë was born in Lachine, Quebec, in 1964 and has had a fascination with drawing since childhood. After graduating with a degree in Design from Montreal's Concordia University, he worked in the animation industry for 13 years, primarily as a background designer and art director. During this period, despite working full time, he also began receiving international acclaim for his watercolour paintings through competitions, juried shows and solo exhibitions. In 2000, he switched to oil as his primary medium and, two years later, gave up the day job to become a full-time artist. He describes himself as a realist who is open to virtually all subject matter, but his paintings mostly focus on urban environments, cityscapes and architecture in cities like New York, San Francisco and Montreal.
***marklague.com***

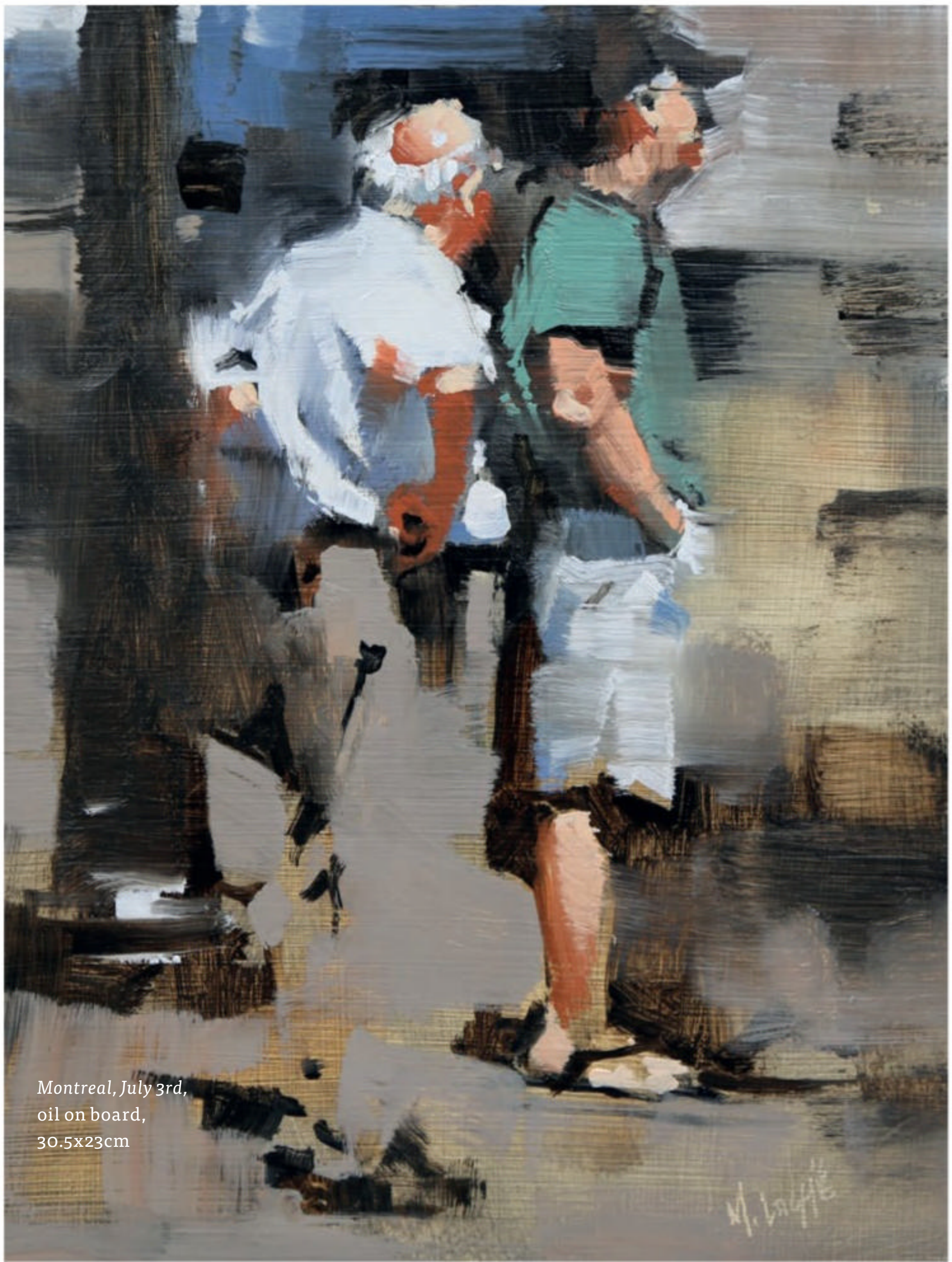
**I had an early love of drawing and doodling, and still practise it every day.**
As a teenager I would experiment with the tiniest little Radiograph pen nib I could find, the kind a draftsman would use, and I'd build up details in pointillist dots. I'd start with a light freehand pencil drawing and then fill it in with ink, spending hours and hours on just a single square centimetre. Even today, I always have a small sketchbook with me, and my new favourite sketching medium is a water soluble Pentel pen, and a water brush that creates washes when the brush hits the ink.

**I worked with watercolour for years before switching to oil.**
When I began to paint, I actually learned to use oil first. But while I was still a student, I came across some watercolour books by Zoltan Szabo and Charles Reid, and I was mesmerised. Watercolour is the only medium that moves after you lay it down, and it's so fun to use. One thing you find out early on, is that watercolour can't be tamed. Once you realise it's the boss, you learn to just let it do its thing and not try to fix every mistake. But, ironically, I think that's the reason I later switched to oil as my primary medium. While not being as spontaneous as watercolour, I found that oil allowed me more control over the process, especially with larger works.

**Over the years, my studio has evolved into a very efficient place to work.**
I have two main painting stations, one for smaller works, and one with a ▶



*Into The Cab*, oil on board, 30.5x30.5cm



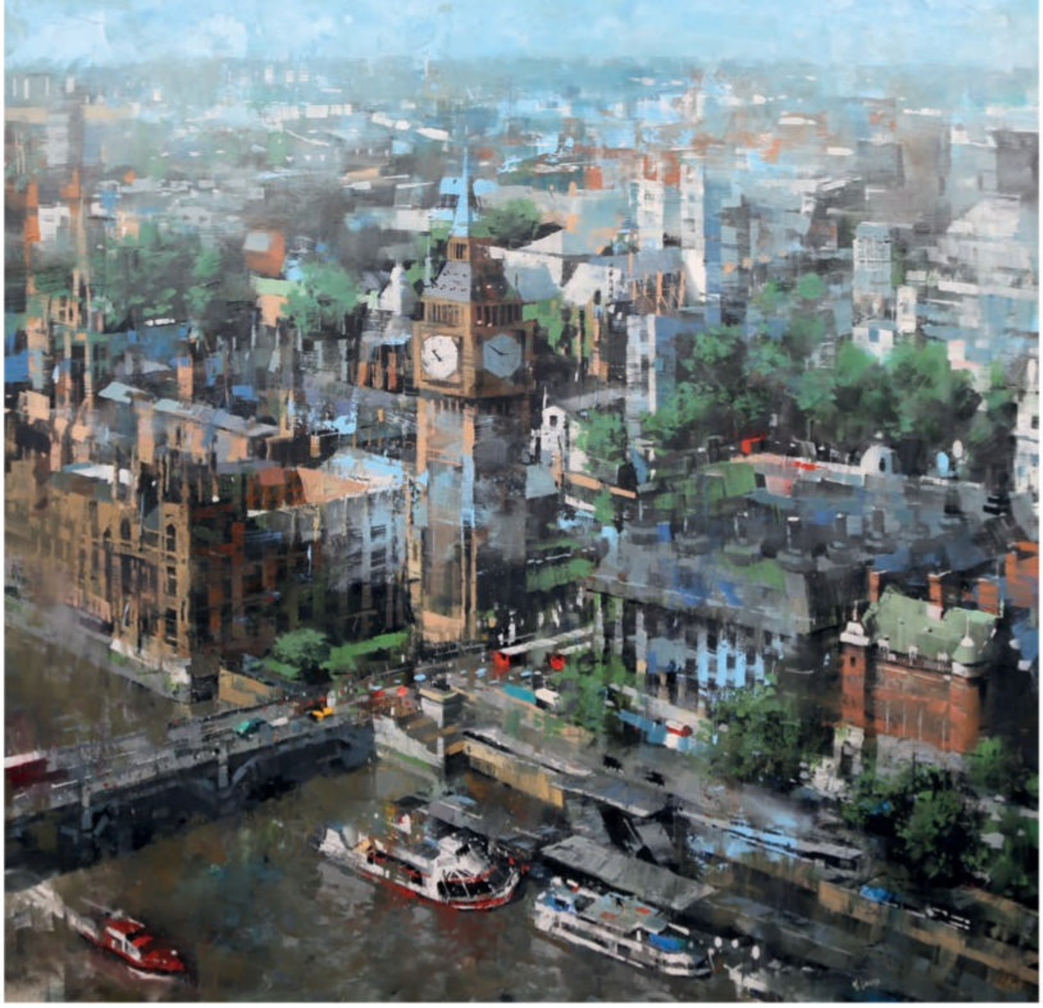
*Montreal, July 3rd*, oil on board, 30.5x23cm counterbalanced easel for large works. I used to work *en plein air* all the time, but I almost never do now. When I did, it was always just to do small finished pieces in the field. I was never inclined to use the sketches as reference for larger studio paintings.

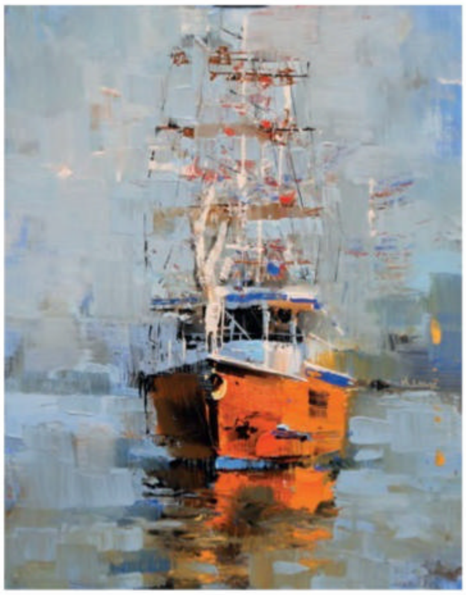
**I've taken thousands of photos over the years.**
I used to travel extensively on photo reference trips, especially to New York. That has slowed down considerably. I can still find inspiration in the many thousands of photos I've taken, and find a fresh way to approach it. As for my aerial works, I tend to use stock photo sites, where I can pay for the rights to use a photo as reference. I have a drone, and it's fun to fly, and I'd love to do my own drone shots of iconic bridges and buildings, but the logistics almost always make it impossible. Recently, I've been finding inspiration in quirky still life setups with beer and Gatorade bottles, which also affords me the opportunity to work from life.

**A very large painting can take up to five days to complete.**
But I generally finish smaller and mid-size works in one session. I find my work is stronger and more spontaneous when I work *alla prima*, but to achieve a good composition while painting like this, one must do some measure of planning. I never begin an *alla prima* painting without first doing a value study in pencil, usually followed by a small oil sketch to work out potential colour problems.

**It's the absence of light that makes the light.**
That binary nature of dark and light is what I always stress to students. I tell them: 'don't paint the thing, paint the shape. Also, don't paint the shape: paint the shape next to the shape.' I try to establish a solid value foundation in all my work. All colour has a value, so colour is secondary to value. You can paint with all the colours of the spectrum, but if you're lacking a solid value foundation, your painting will not be successful. A strong painting will generally have no more than five to seven value shapes of various sizes. In urban night settings, the most extreme jumps in value are created with the darkest darks alongside the lightest lights.

**I want to simplify and get to the heart of what I paint.**
I want to create the illusion of detail without rendering every element explicitly. I did a workshop called 'Lost Edges' on this very thing. The more edges that can be lost and consolidated into larger shapes, the stronger the work is going to be. Those areas where the viewer completes the shape with minimal information is where the magic lies. I've never really thought about the less representational elements of my work as falling under the textbook definition of Impressionism. I've always wanted to have a strong foundational structure to my work, while simultaneously eliminating and simplifying shapes, so that the viewer plays an active role piecing together the elements of the work. It's just so much more interesting to me than straight realism.

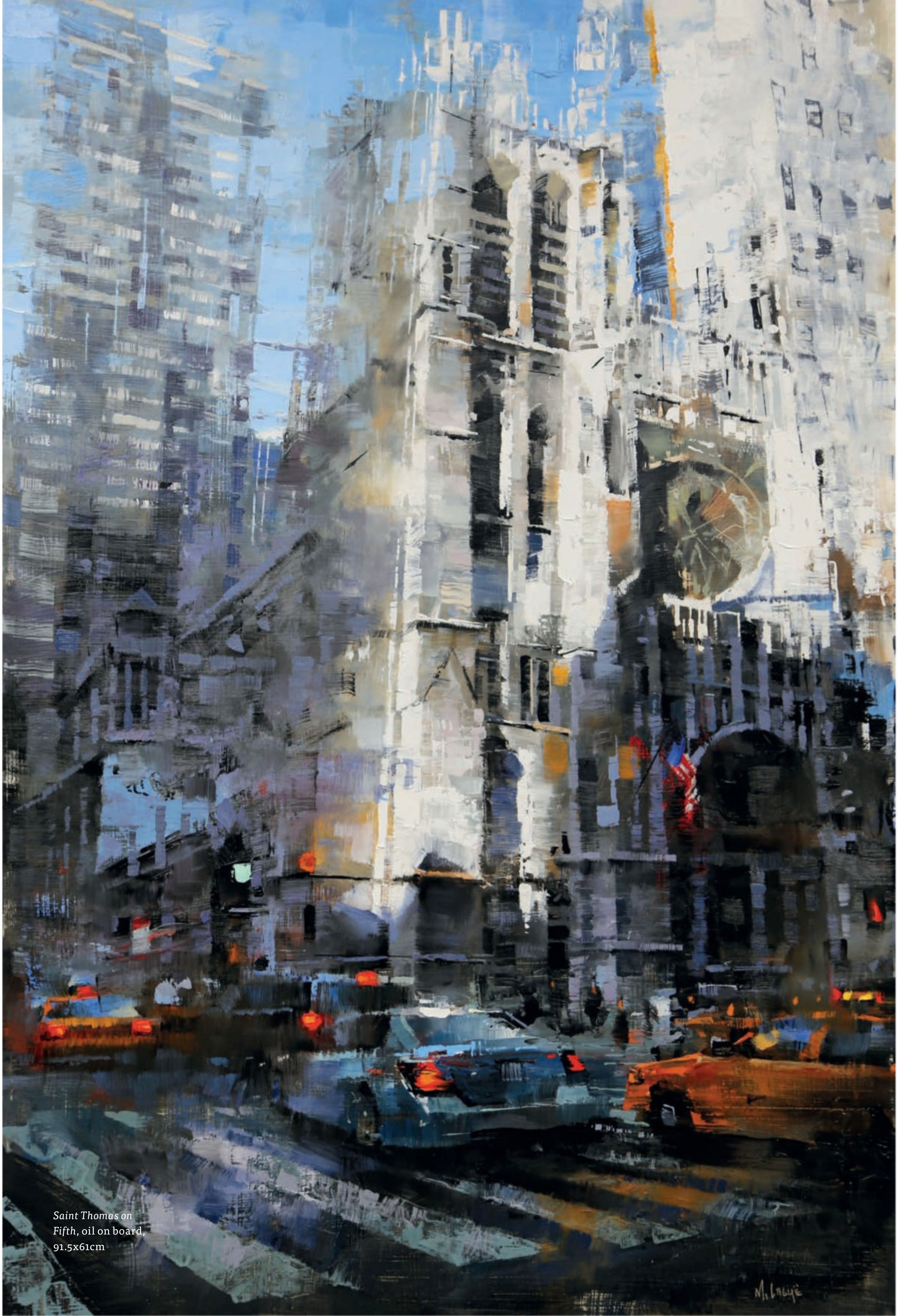




**TOP** *London, Parliment Afternoon*, oil on board, 122x122cm **BOTTOM** *Orange Trawler*, oil on board, 122x122cm

**I never know when a painting is finished.**
I've just learned over the years to walk away when I start reaching for small brushes. Once in a while I'll come back for some 'editing,' but that's really quite rare. Sometimes a painting just works; I'd find it tough to choose my own favourite, but *Saint Thomas on Fifth* (right) is one of those paintings where everything came together.

**I love the imperfections you get in the manmade world and how that relates to the cars, especially on reflections.**
I love painting rainy scenes and am especially inspired by night scenes. They offer a wide range of contrasts that really appeal to me: there's something very exciting about reflections on a city street full of cracks and potholes. Like snowflakes, no two reflections are the same. I have a whole bank of photos of Montreal streets in the rain which I can use as reference for any city in the world. There's something about the way light hits certain architectures that's as exciting for me as the way light hits a face. As light descends between buildings and washes over cars and streets, incredible patterns are created. ◻

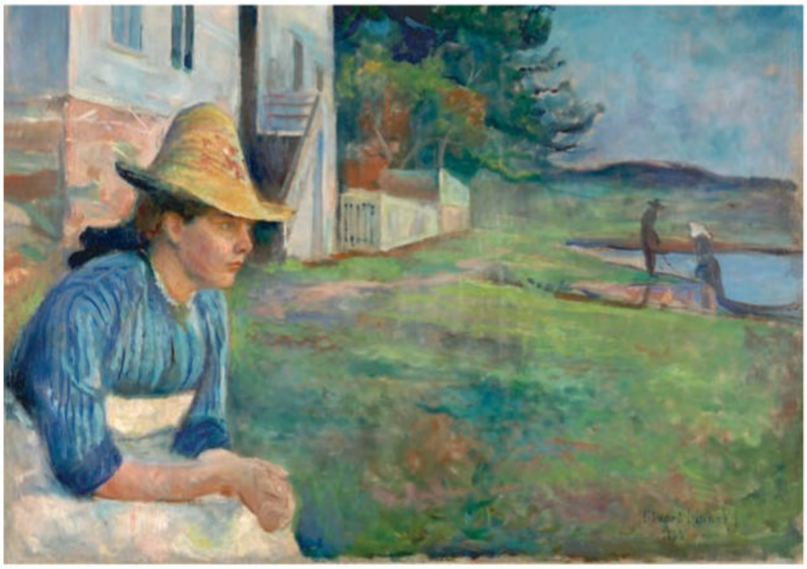


*Saint Thomas on Fifth*, oil on board, 91.5x61cm

**EXHIBITION**

# Edvard Munch: Portraits

Here, we look into the life and work of Norwegian artist Edvard Munch, most famously known for *The Scream*. But his legacy is much more than that, says *Amanda Hodges*



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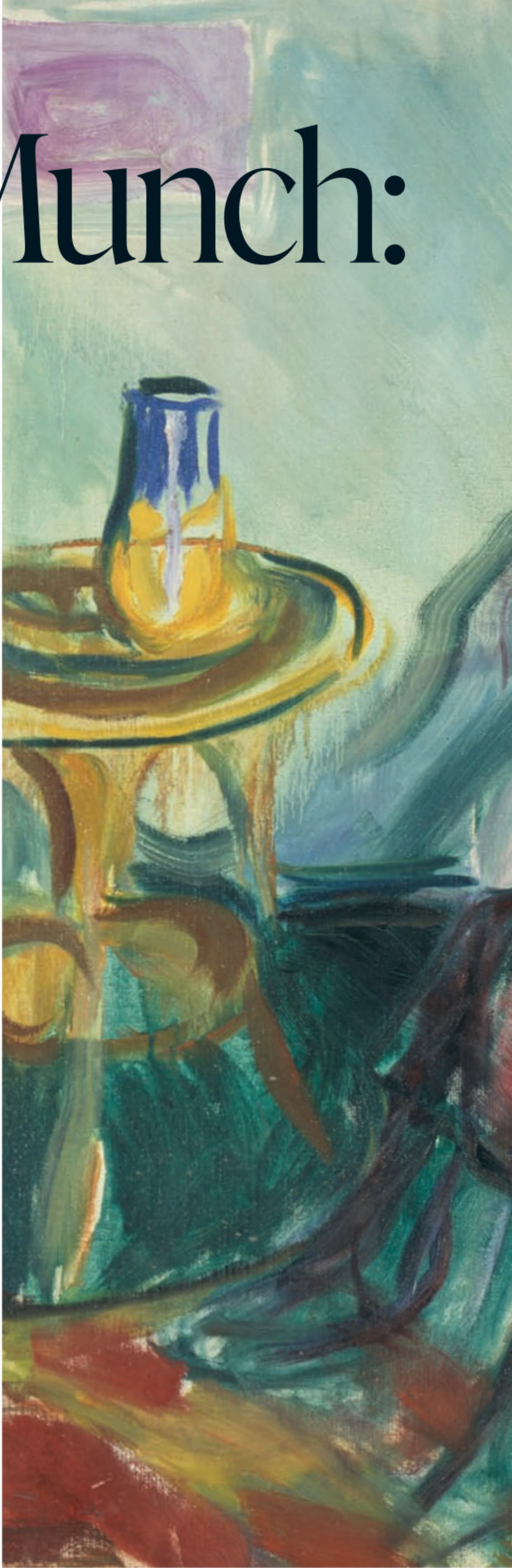


© MUNCHMUSEET. PHOTO: MUNCHMUSEET / SIDSEL DE JONG

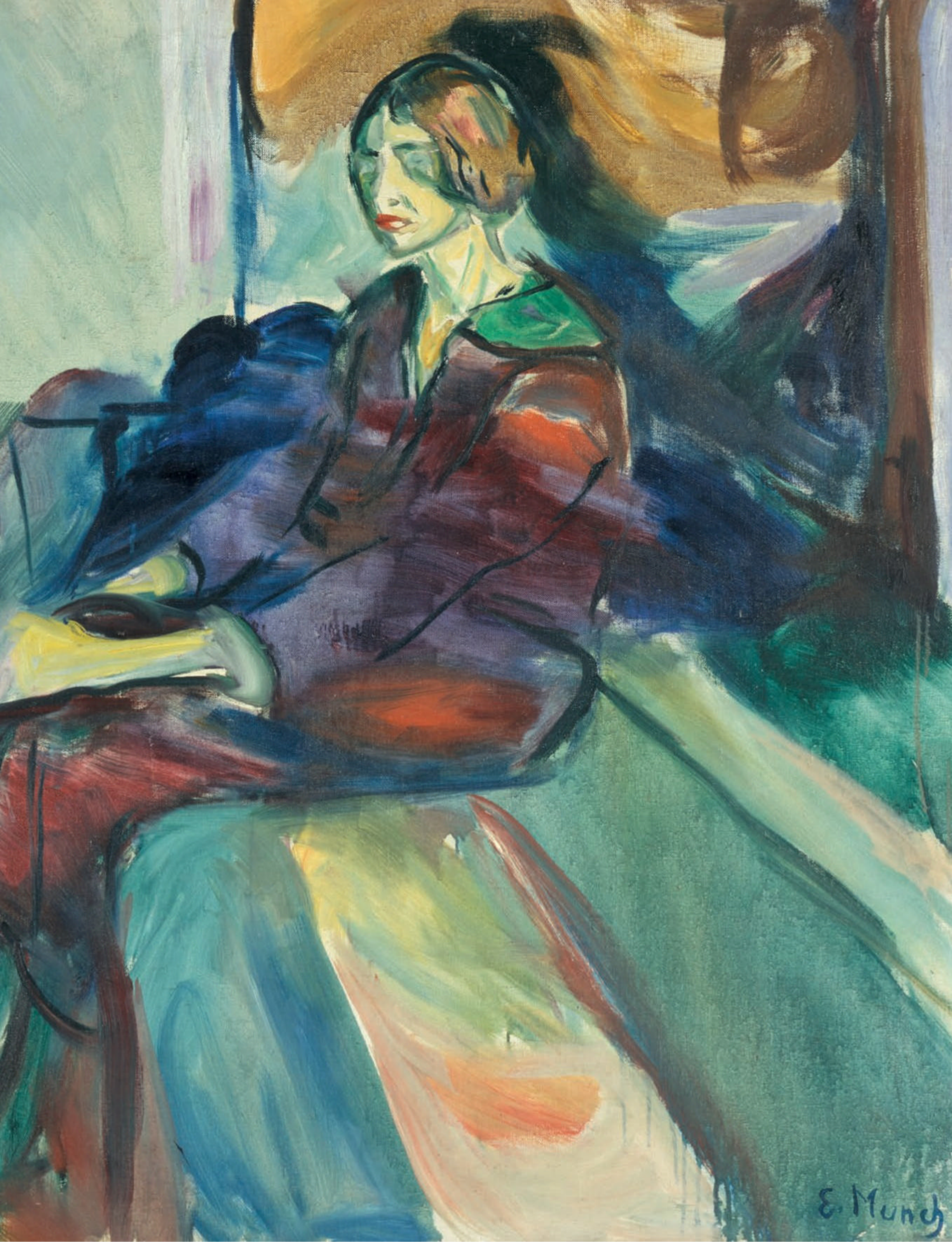
**ABOVE** *Evening*, 1888, oil on canvas **RIGHT** *Seated Model on the Couch, Birgit Prestøe*, 1924, oil on canvas

“I WILL PAINT LIVING PEOPLE who breathe and feel and suffer and love.” So once avowed Norwegian artist Edvard Munch, perhaps best known for his existential painting *The Scream*. It was a declaration that shaped his career and his prolific but lesser-known portrait work is now the subject of an exciting new exhibition at the National Portrait Gallery, the first UK showcase devoted solely to this aspect of his artistic legacy.

NPG Chief Curator Dr Alison Smith says, “Throughout his life, Munch sought to delve behind the masks of those he portrayed, using expressive paintwork to reveal inner feelings. This exhibition provides a unique opportunity to appreciate his work as a portraitist both in terms of his personal relationship with his sitters and with how he portrayed them.”

For many, Munch seems the quintessential Modernist painter, *The Scream* encapsulating all the angst of the modern world. Born in 1863 and studying at art college in Kristiana (today’s Oslo) he experienced a difficult, lonely childhood after the early death of both mother and older sister, saying, “From the moment of my birth, the angels of anxiety, worry and death stood at my side and followed me in the sun of springtime and in the glories of summer.”

In these formative years, often dogged by poor health and thwarted in love, Munch was influenced by nihilist Hans Jæger, who encouraged him to ▶


E. Munch

chronicle his emotional and psychological state; what was termed 'soul painting,' and, by the early 1890s, from this emerged Munch's idiosyncratic style, one incorporating free-flowing lines, vibrant, enhanced colours and expressively handled paint, all adding innate drama.

Throughout his life he'd often paint landscapes but always returned to portraiture with its expressive possibilities and it's this element that's appealed to the National Portrait Gallery. As Dr Smith comments, "in this country people are familiar with Munch's work like *The Frieze of Life* and *The Scream*, but his portraits aren't so well known so it's a really good opportunity to focus on this aspect of his art." There's much diversity on offer. Visitors will discover "lithographs, drypoints and etchings, plus woodcuts. The portraits will mainly be in oils, but Munch also did watercolours and drawings, and was a fantastic printmaker."

In terms of subject, Munch cast a wide net, incorporating "portraits of people he knew, family, artist friends and collectors, but there are also a lot of self-portraits through which we chart his development. It's a time when biography was emerging as a new area of interest for artists, chronicling their own psychological wellbeing. For so many artists, the self is a readily available subject, but I think Munch was more interested in the interior life as well as external appearances; we're looking at the two together," says Dr Smith. "What's interesting about the self-portraits is how different they are, and how Munch gets a sense of self in different guises – he's really playing with identity."

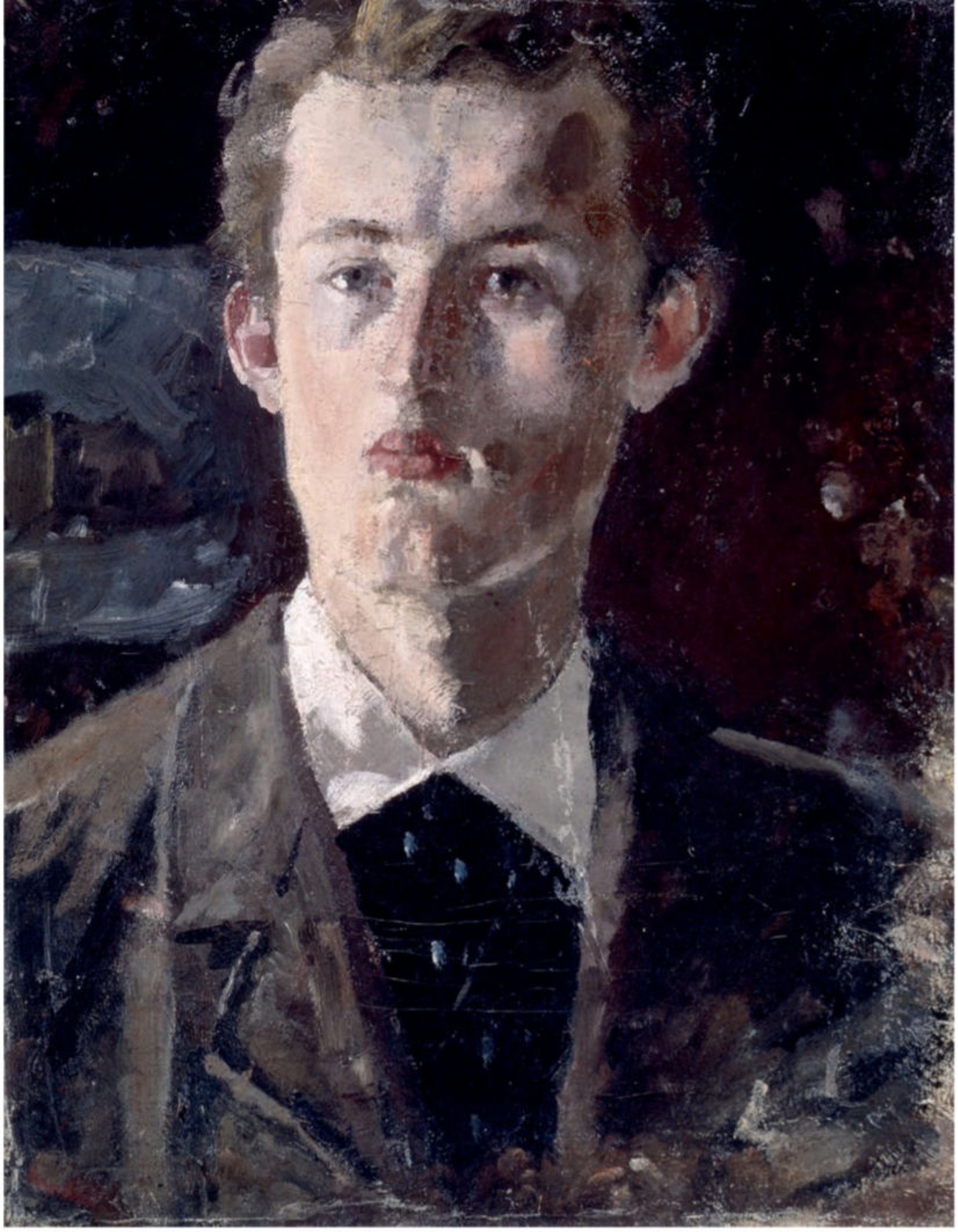


PHOTO: FREDRIK BIRKELUND/OSLO MUSEUM.

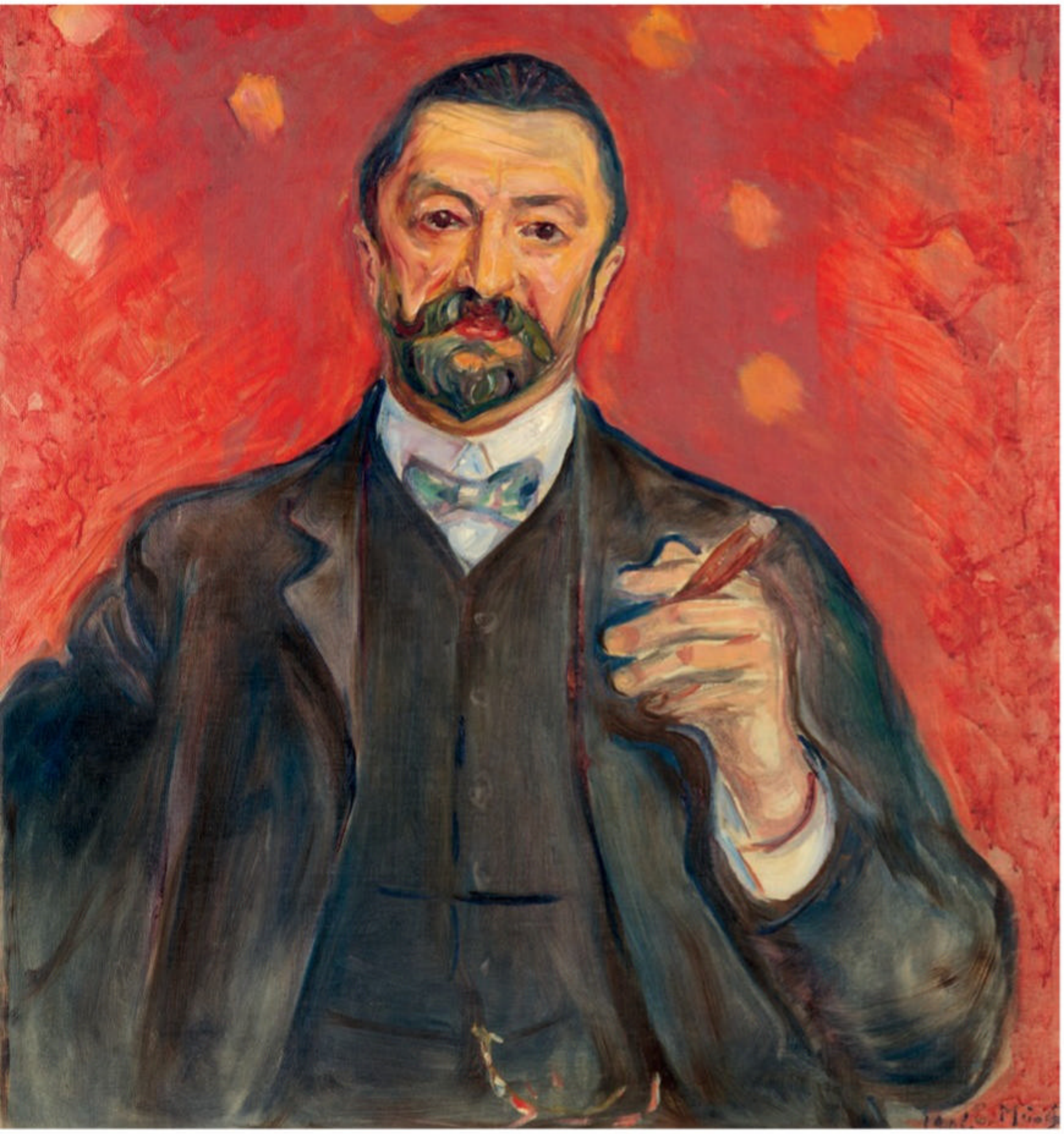
Munch was certainly an artist consumed by primal emotions, skilled at capturing universal themes – of love, loss, or desire – and brilliantly translating them onto canvas. Interestingly, for a man beset by personal demons, he accepted his turbulent existence, acknowledging, "my fear of life is necessary. Without anxiety and illness, I am a ship without a rudder. My art is grounded in reflections over being different. My sufferings are part of my self and my art. They are indistinguishable from me and their destruction would destroy my art."

The exhibition adopts a linear structure, chronicling each stage of Munch's artistic development. "It follows the trajectory of his life so it starts off in Kristiana (Oslo) with early, more naturalist works focused on himself and his family, they were the models readily available," says Dr Smith. "Then, it moves to his interaction with a group called Kristiana Bohemians, artists, writers and intellectuals questioning the social values of the day. These were portraits of other artists or writers, individuals in dark, dingy offices or interiors, debating philosophy and life. Then, it looks at life with other bohemians in Paris and in Berlin where Munch lived during the 1890s where his portraiture takes on a more symbolist dimension."

As he became more established, "the middle section shifts gear again and looks at Munch's return to Berlin in 1902 where he became successful and gathered a group of patrons and collectors, wealthy and benevolent, who welcomed him and promoted his art. His portraits really reflect both his confidence and the liberal, open outlook of these patrons which tend often to be large-scale, full-length portraits; really bright colours, painted with great energy and verve."

Despite professional acclaim, this period culminated with personal disintegration, as Dr Smith endorses. "He had a physical and mental breakdown around 1908 and was admitted into a psychiatric clinic in Copenhagen. There, he recovered and returned to Norway. Now successful and wealthy, he gathered around him a group he called his Lifeguards or Guardians, male friends who defended his reputation and looked after him.To honour them he painted these wonderful full-length portraits which he kept for himself as a kind of defensive shield against the rigours of the outer world. The portraits of the friends and guardians are very important. At the same time he also admitted people like servants into his home to model. During the twenties and thirties downturn of fortunes during the Weimar Republic, German patrons gradually became replaced by Norwegian patrons and they helped establish his reputation in his homeland."

It's always refreshing to see a new slant to something familiar and, as Dr Smith says, this exhibition offers just that perspective. "It's looking at Munch's work in a different light. He's usually seen as a painter of angst and alienation, this will show him as a more social person, a man with a wide range of connections with people from the world of business or medicine. On the one hand he was



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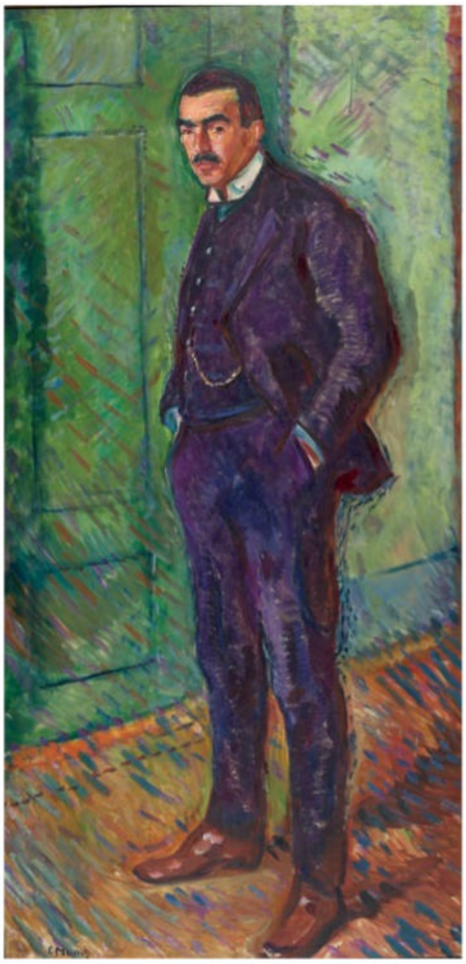

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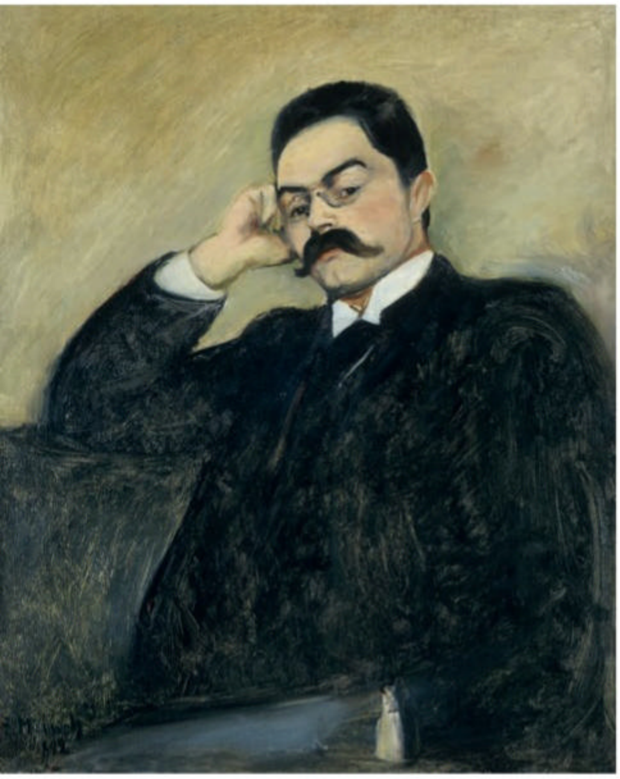
**FAR LEFT** *Self-Portrait*, 1882-83, oil on unprimed cardboard **LEFT** *Felix Auerbach*, 1906, oil on canvas **BOTTOM LEFT** *Thor Lütken*, 1892, oil on canvas **ABOVE** *Jappe Nilssen*, 1909, oil on canvas



PRIVATE COLLECTION. PHOTO: MUNCHMUSEET / SIDSEL DE JONG

cosmopolitan, with a reputation established in mainland Europe, but at the same time was also Norwegian. It shows how deeply connected he was with some of the main intellectual and philosophical currents in Europe at the time."

Visitors may be surprised. Unexpectedly perhaps. "Many people Munch represented were establishment figures, or wealthy, bourgeois figures. There were doctors, lawyers, he wasn't always operating around people on the bohemian fringe. His relationships with women were rather turbulent and all disastrous, but he was also capable of really good friendships." Dr Smith emphatically calls him "a man's man" and acknowledges, "it's a very masculine exhibition, as most of the sitters are male."

Overall, the exhibition's journey encompasses "small, dark, naturalistic works all the way through to rather expressive large-scale, very colourful works." Munch's consummate ability to capture, with one broad brushstroke, "this idea of immediacy" is one of his key attributes as an artist, feels Dr Smith. Many portraits, "have an unfinished quality, a sort of energy, commented upon during his lifetime, so you get the canvas showing through or sometimes canvases are unprimed. I think this is what appeals to contemporary art, the material qualities of paint and what that paint is representing."

She also cites motivation as pivotal for Munch. "When he painted portraits, they weren't all on commission, he painted portraits because he wanted to and often wanted to test himself against a particular sitter. It's about his relationship with that sitter and how he perceived them, just trying to put somebody down at a particular moment – seizing the impression." Enthusiastically, she adds, "anyone who paints portraits should definitely make a point of coming to see the exhibition as there are some wonderful paintings and, because there's this unfinished quality, I think artists will really appreciate the way he paints."

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*Edvard Munch Portraits, 15 June 2025, National Portrait Gallery, npg.org.uk* ◻

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The Neoart 6901 Pastels come in 48 rich, highly-pigmented colours, offering a wide spectrum of shades that allow for both subtle gradations and bold, striking contrasts. These pastels are carefully crafted from a wax and oil blended formula. The wax component provides a smooth, silky texture, while the oil base ensures depth and vibrancy. As a result, these pastels glide effortlessly across the paper or canvas, allowing artists to layer and blend with ease; without worrying about crumbling or dusting.

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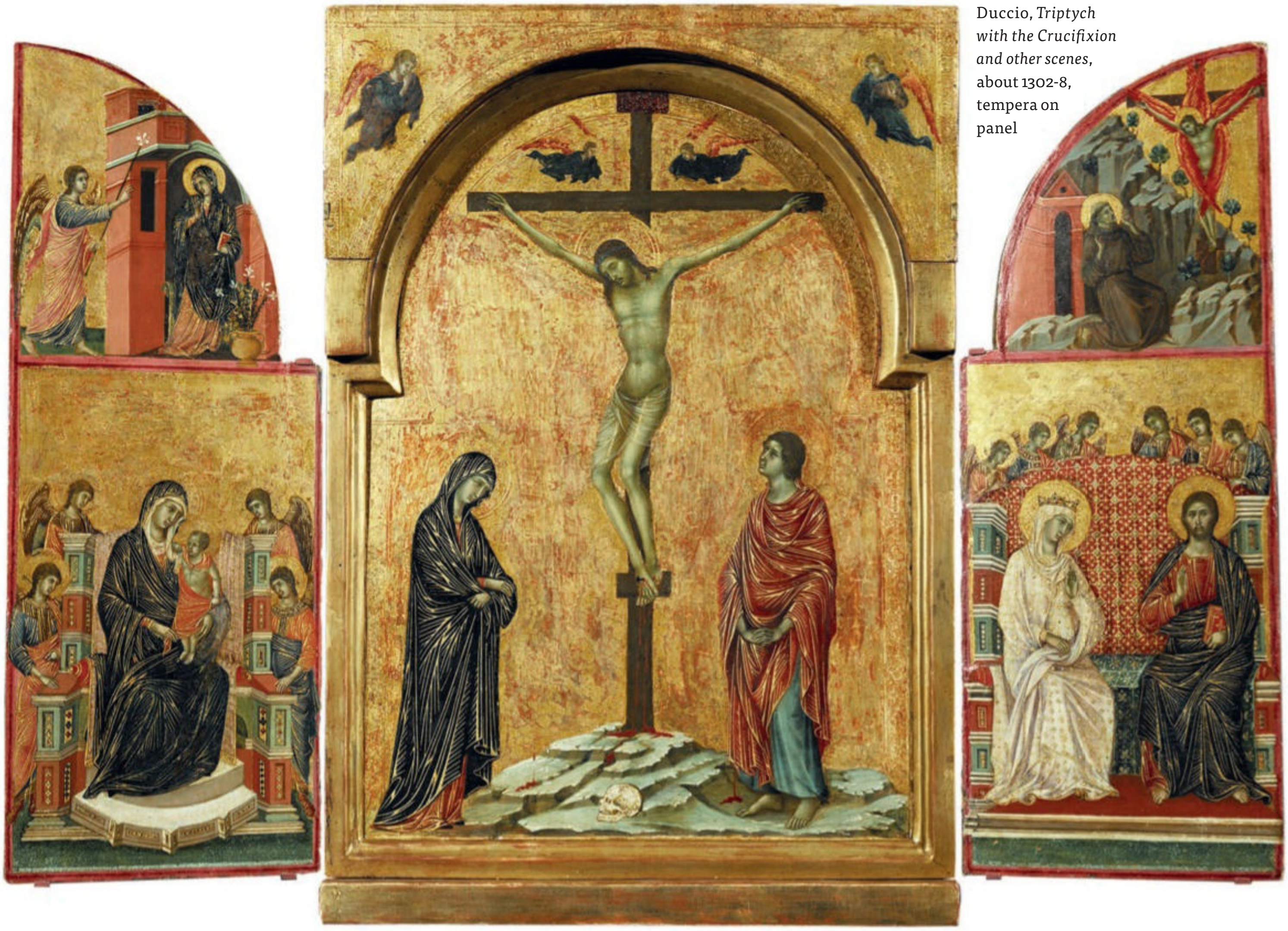
# The Rise of Pain

The beginning of the 14th century in central Italy was a radical moment for art. A new exhibition highlights over a hundred exhibits made by artisans at this time, working in Siena and beyond. It's a must-see, says *Amanda Hodges*



Duccio, *Triptych with the Crucifixion and other scenes*, about 1302-8, tempera on panel

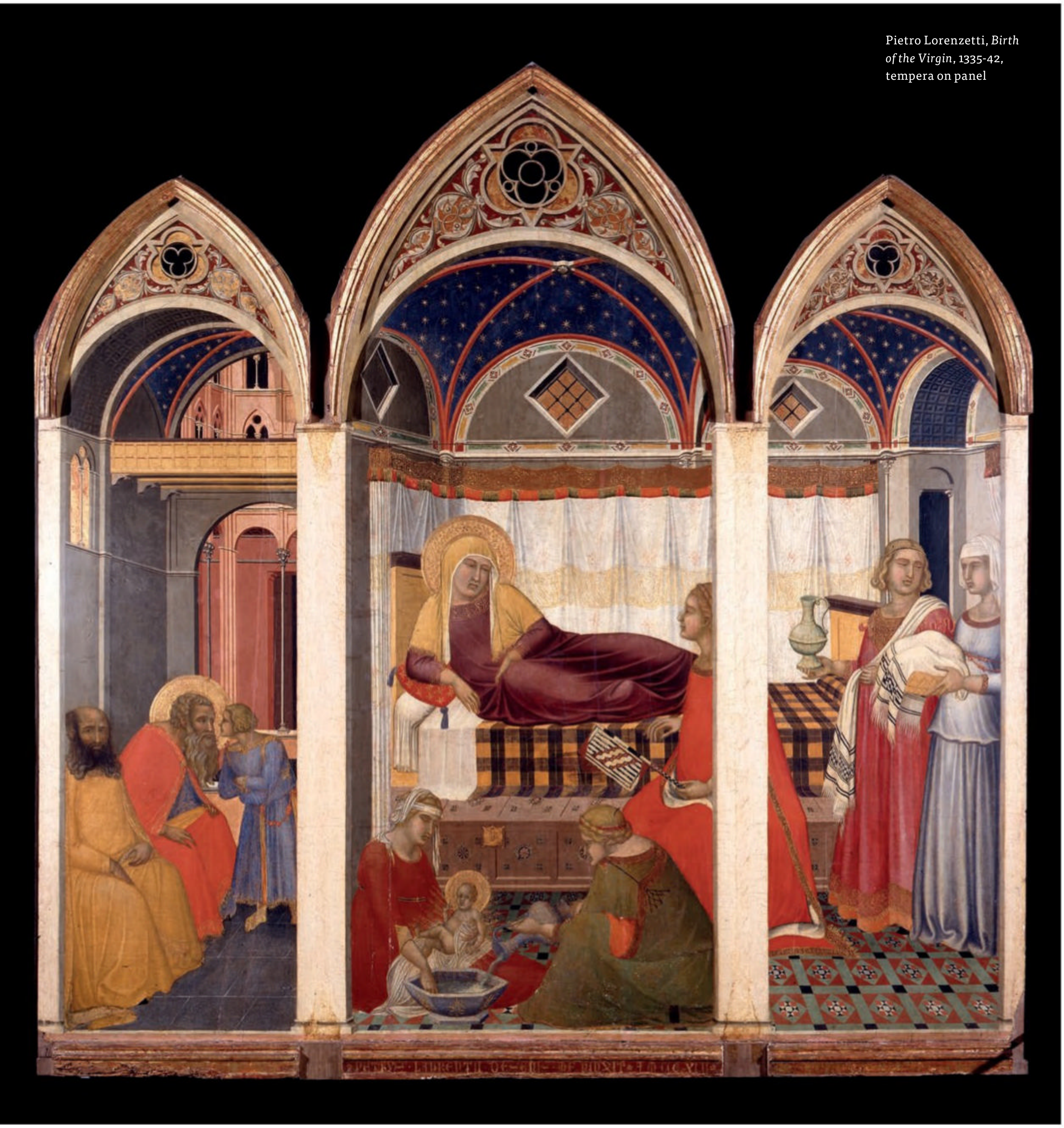
ROYAL COLLECTION TRUST / © HIS MAJESTY KING CHARLES III 2024

AT THE DAWN OF THE 14TH CENTURY in Siena, major changes were evolving within the art world. It was a time that the National Gallery dubs, "a golden moment for art, a catalyst of change," and this pivotal Renaissance period in Western Art forms the subject of their new exhibition, part of the Gallery's Bicentenary celebrations. Italian artists like Duccio, Simone Martini and brothers Pietro and Ambrogio Lorenzetti were all creating a new type of painting, one that heralded radical change as established ideas gave way to more fluid artistic expression.

Laura Llewellyn, the Gallery's Curator of Italian Paintings before 1500, describes the show's central premise. "In the exhibition, we explore the art of painting in Siena around the turn of the 14th century as a crucial point in the story of Western painting. Much of what we now take for granted in terms of what a painting can do was being formulated at this time." As an example, she cites, "The idea that painting can tell a story or portray a moment of high drama or profound emotion. Or that a painting can create the illusion of three-dimensional space on its two-dimensional surface. Or even that a painter might sign his work so that long after death the painter and the work remain bound together. As Laura explains, "Today, we expect a painting to do all these things, but in the period in question they were innovations just germinating."

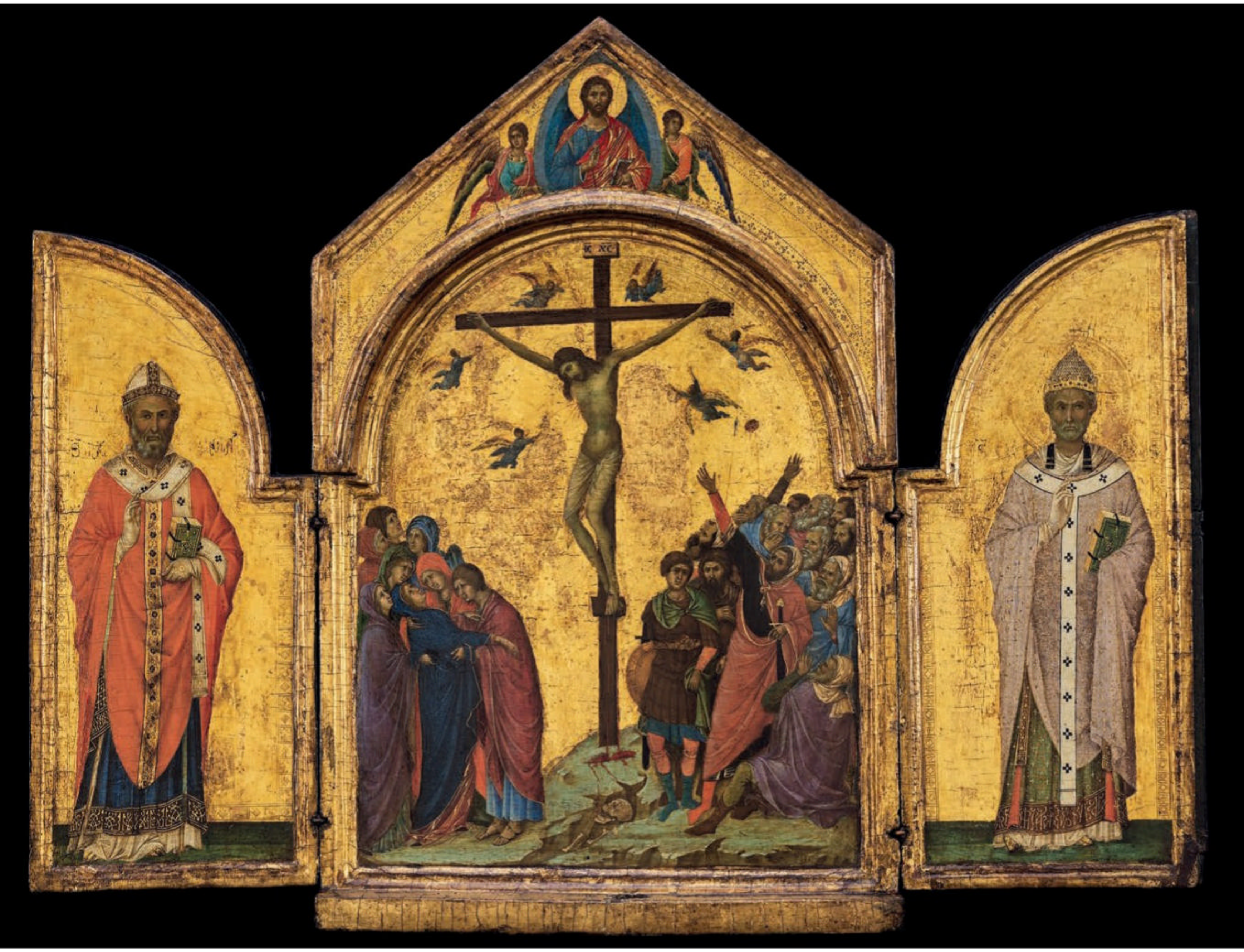
Everything was changing. There was a greater emphasis on human experience, Dante's Divine Comedy was written in Italian, not Latin for ease of accessibility, and in the wider world the simple virtues espoused by the Franciscans helped highlight Christ's human ▸

# ting, 1300-1350



Pietro Lorenzetti, *Birth of the Virgin*, 1335-42, tempera on panel

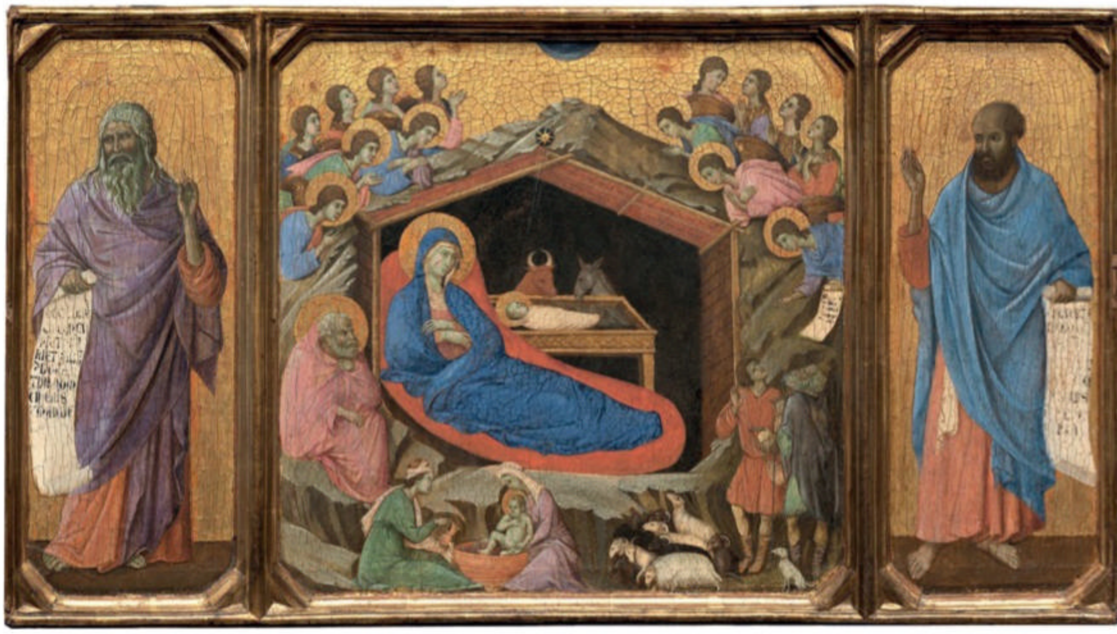
MUSEO DELL'OPERA DELLA METROPOLITANA, SIENA



nature, leading to religious art displaying a new, closer identification with people's experience. Artists also began to expand the range of gestures and emotions expressed.

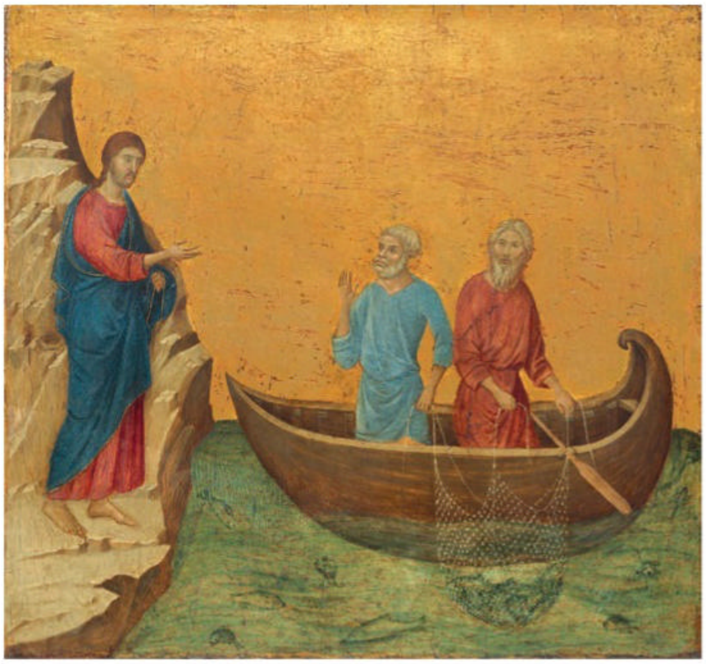
"This is a moment when the status of painting as an art form is elevated, ultimately becoming the pre-eminent art form of the age," says Laura. "The very existence of the National Gallery, exclusively a paintings collection, is the ultimate expression of the prestige of painting. Given this, it made sense for us to celebrate our 200-year history, by exploring one of the places and one of the epochs where pivotal advancements in the history of painting were made. Florence is often celebrated as the cultural heart of the Renaissance, but Siena too was influential in the way its artists shaped the future of their profession.

Prior to this time, the artistic status quo was very different. "Siena already had an



© COURTESY NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART, WASHINGTON

**OPPOSITE PAGE, TOP** Duccio, *Triptych with the Crucifixion, Saint Nicholas, Saint Clement and the Redeemer with Angels*, 1311-8, tempera and gold on wood **BOTTOM** Duccio, *The Nativity with the Prophets Isaiah and Ezekiel*, about 1308, tempura on panel **THIS PAGE, RIGHT** Duccio, *The Calling of the Apostles Peter and Andrew*, about 1308-11, tempera on canvas **BELOW** Simone Martini, *The Annunciate Virgin*, about 1326-34, tempura on poplar



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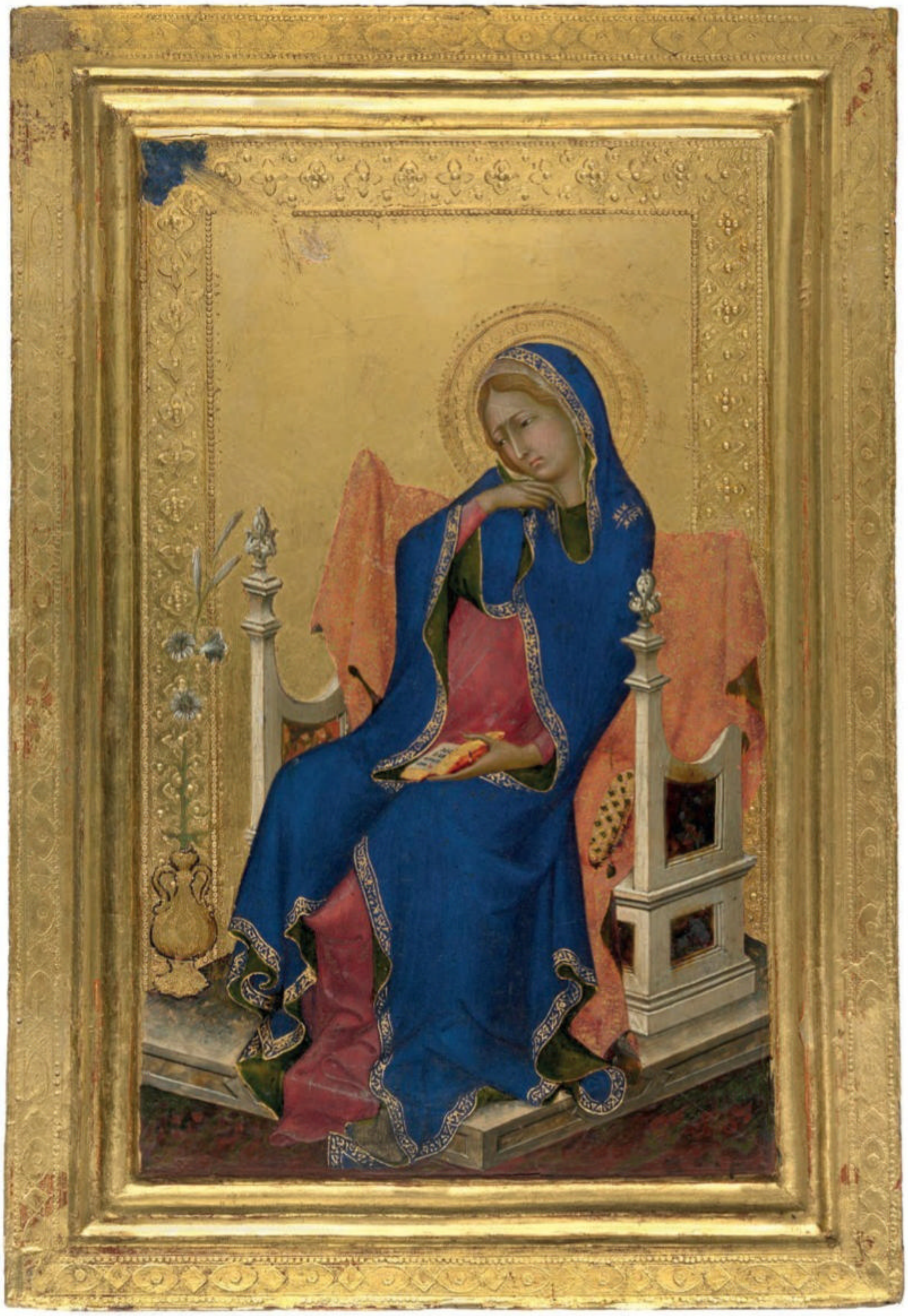

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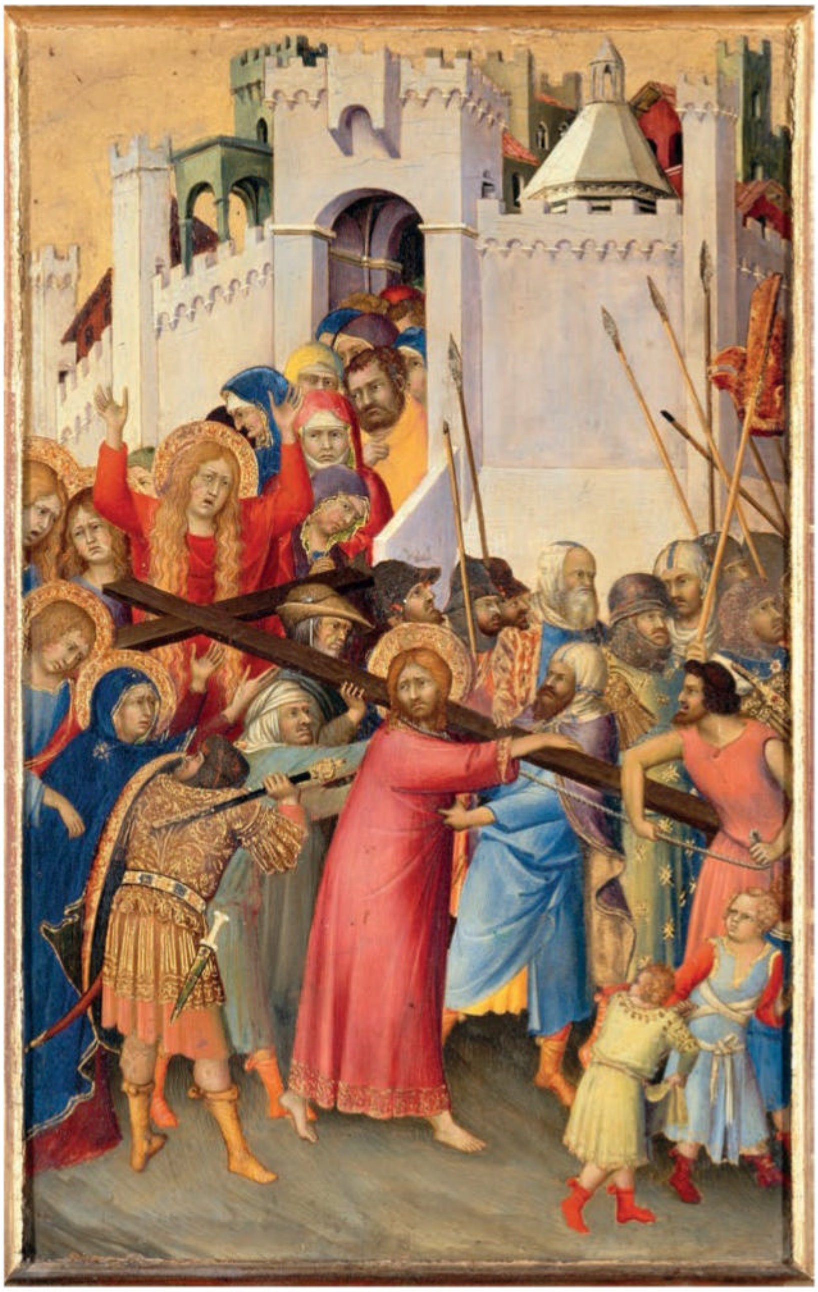
established tradition of producing panel paintings of high quality, the vast majority images of the Virgin and Child. Though from the 1260s onwards, the Sienese style was increasingly distinctive, artists at this date were still relying heavily on the example of Byzantine-inspired works made in other Italian artistic centres such as Pisa, Lucca and Florence." As Laura makes clear, "Byzantine images tended to follow set types based on famous icons, whose model could not be adapted or reinvented," and this stymied the possibility of fluidity. The exhibition opens with several "exquisite examples of paintings found or made in Siena during this time," displayed to explain what preceded this innovative era. "They're important for showing the tradition from which Duccio emerged and for shedding light on how he departed from existing conventions."

A native of Siena, Duccio di Buoninsegna was one of the most important painters of 14th-century Italy and ran a large workshop shaping generations of Sienese artists. His double-sided Maestà altarpiece (tempera and gold on wood) originally graced Siena's majestic cathedral from 1311. It was one of the first works to demonstrate perspective in art, attracting pilgrims everywhere with its depiction of the Madonna and Child on the front amidst saints and angels, and a multitude of small scenes on the reverse. A gifted narrative artist, Duccio made the figures appear as if set into an interior space, the Maestà reflecting both the more sacred focus of art from the Middle Ages whilst also reflecting the more human-orientated art of the early Renaissance.

The majority of Sienese artists in the early 14th century adopted Duccio's decorative style, which impressively utilised gold and vibrant colour. Simone Martini continued Duccio's vein of lyrical art, famously praised by Petrarch, and with the elegant naturalism of his paintings forming the basis for much courtly art – the International Gothic style. Elsewhere the brothers Lorenzetti excelled at expressive, three-dimensional figure construction, esteemed for their frescoes and showing much feeling for rich colour harmony.

But why was Siena so important in this artistic evolution? Laura Llewellyn explains its integral significance. "Siena held a pivotal position on the via Francigena, the main pilgrimage route connecting Canterbury to Rome. This ancient thoroughfare ran through the city's heart bringing a flow of people and goods, inside its walls. The city also had access to major trade networks, including the Silk Road linking East Asia, Africa and Europe. Siena's bankers operated internationally, ▶



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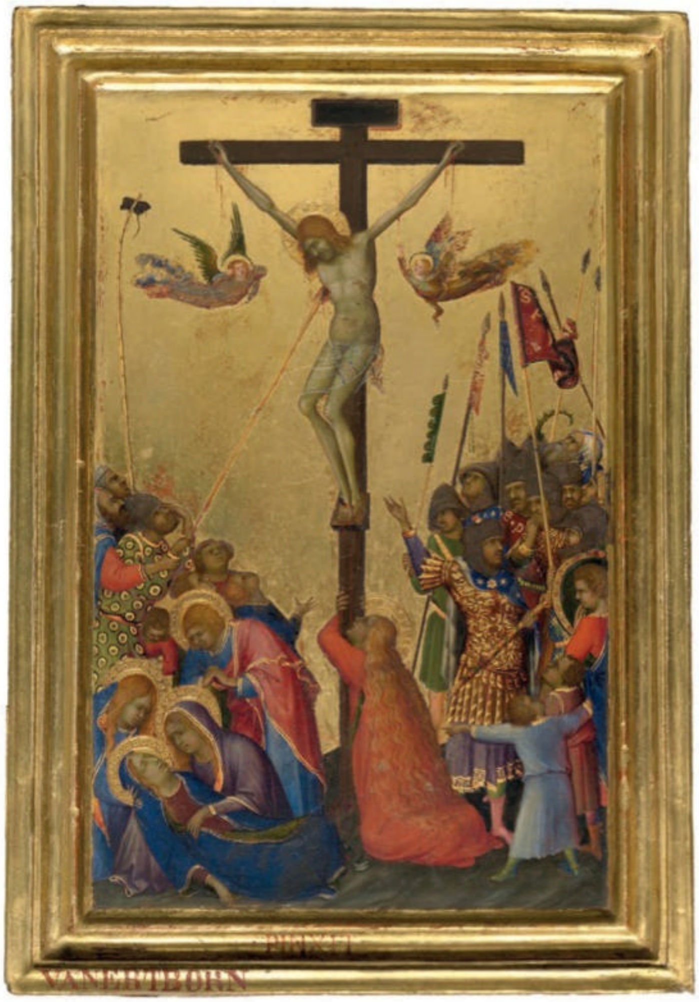

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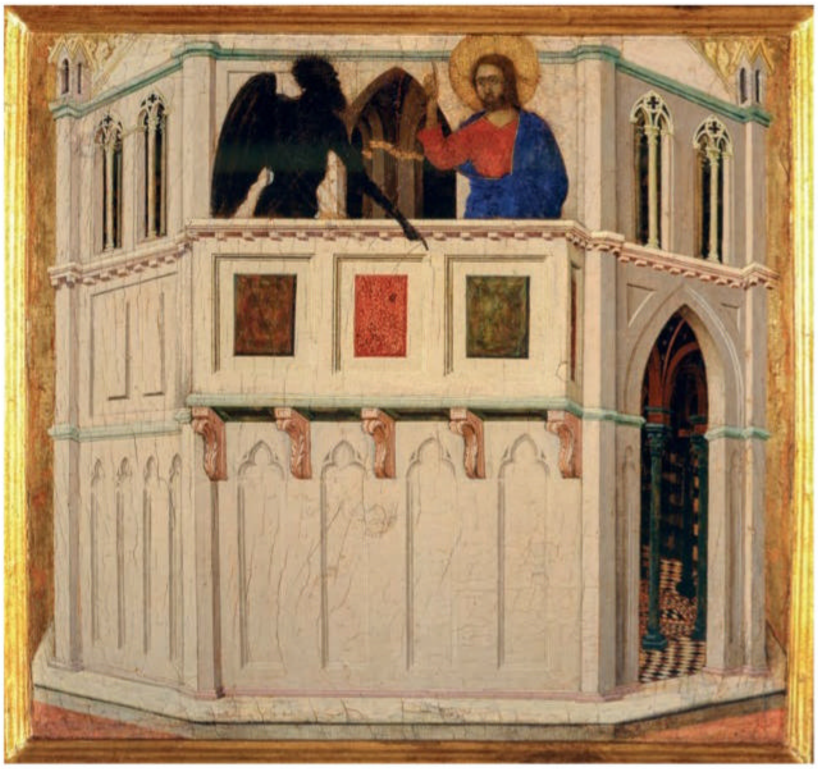

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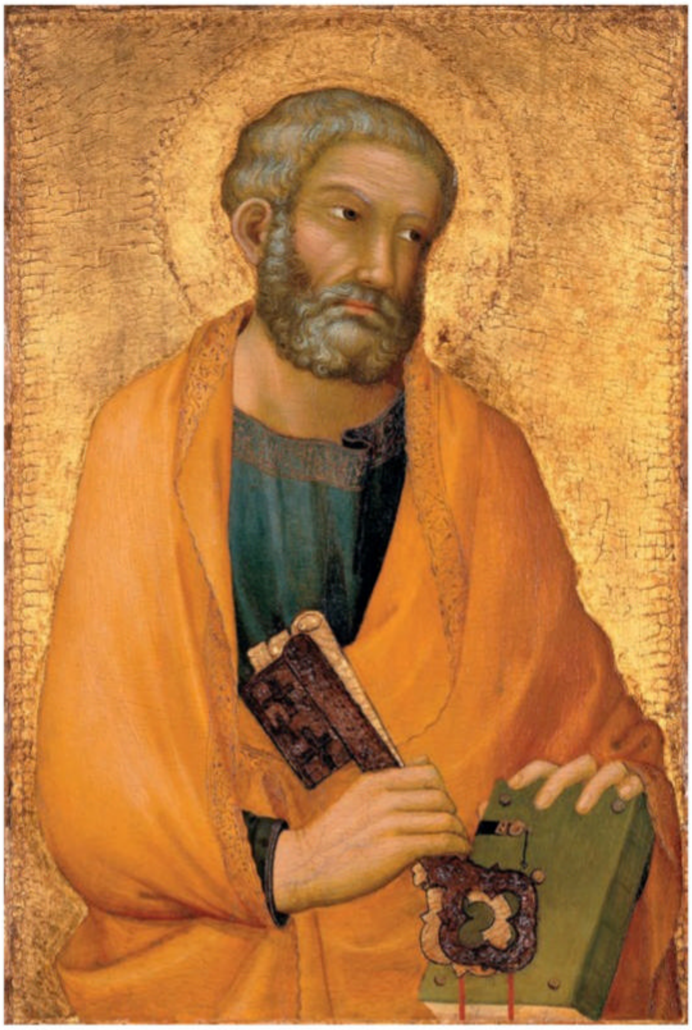

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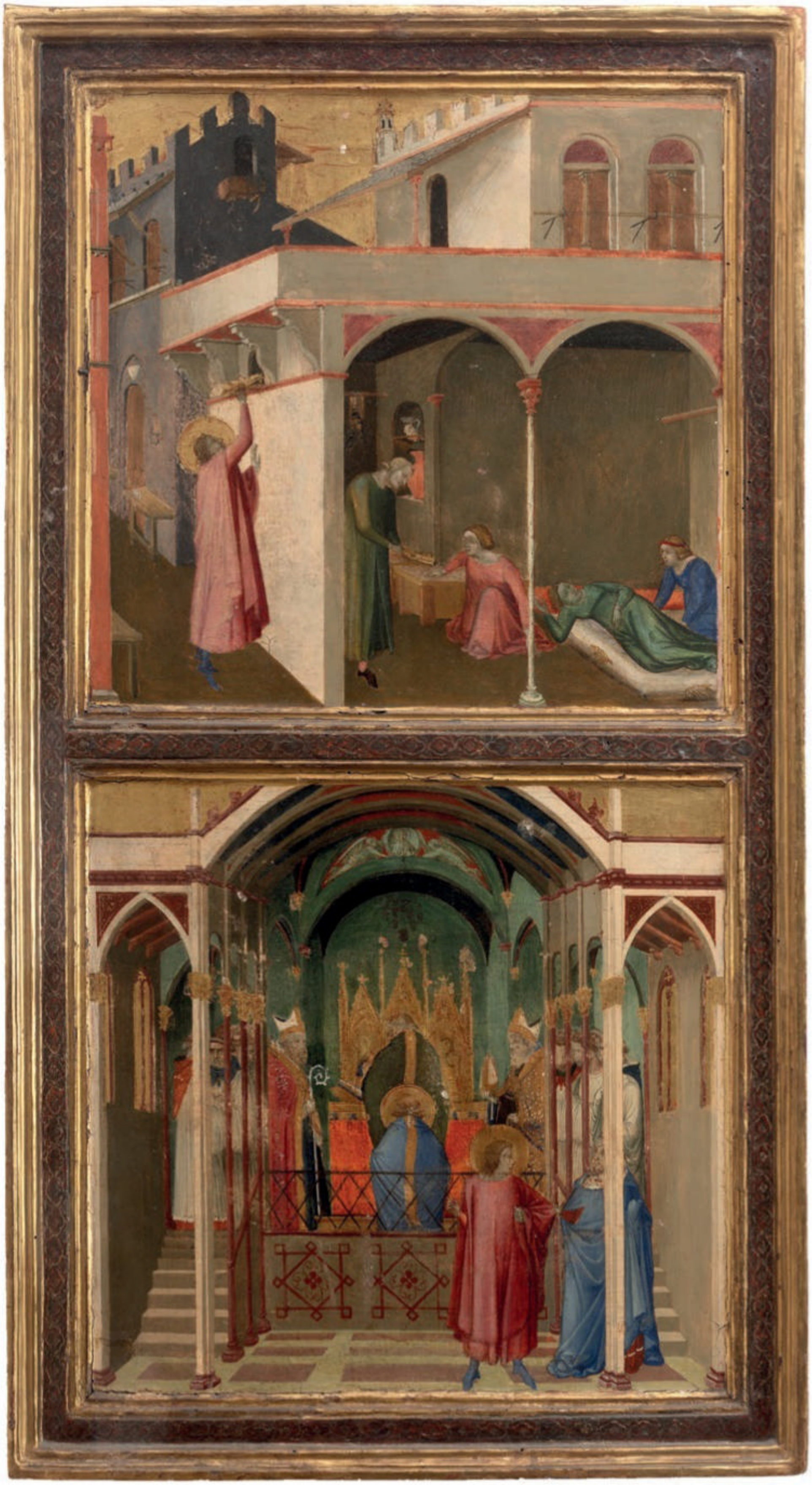

GALLERIE DEGLI UFFIZI, FLORENCE

**OPPOSITE PAGE, TOP LEFT** Simone Martini, *The Way to Calvary*, about 1326-34, tempera on poplar **TOP RIGHT** Simone Martini, *The Deposition*, about 1326-34, tempera on poplar **BOTTOM LEFT** Duccio, *The Temptation of Christ on the Temple*, about 1308-11, tempera on poplar **BOTTOM RIGHT** Simone Martini, *Saint Peter*, about 1326-7, tempera on poplar **THIS PAGE, ABOVE** Ambrogio Lorenzetti, *Stories from the Life of Saint Nicholas*, about 1332-4, tempera on canvas

providing services not only to travelling merchants but also to the highest echelons of the European elite, including the Pope."

It was a time when the city was presided over by a group of nine magistrates, the 'nove'. "Siena's political stability, as well as its prosperity, provided an [ideal] environment for artistic innovation and advancement," comments Laura. "Not only did the Nove government foster the city's physical as well as economic growth, but it also offered patronage opportunities to Siena's artists and craftsmen. So, with stable government and economic prosperity, Siena became a furnace for artistic ambition and innovation. The movement of objects along the city's trading routes – such as Iberian woven silks or Parisian carved ivories – provided ample stimuli to Siena's artists and craftsmen. Sienese goldsmiths and painters also exported works, and so ideas, motifs and visual formats were transferred between place and reiterated in different media."

Within the National's exhibition, visitors will find over a hundred objects on display, the core of which are paintings, a few from the National's collection with the majority on loan; there will also be examples of sculpture, goldsmith work, manuscript illumination, ivory carving and textiles. "By displaying other media alongside paintings," says Laura, "we hope to show the myriad ways in which works of art in different materials, on different scales and for different spaces, intersected, as forms and motifs were replicated and reformulated."

Undoubtedly one of the exhibition's highlights is the way objects long since dispersed, sometimes over several centuries are being brought back together. "Most importantly, we're reuniting all known panels from the back predella of Duccio's great masterpiece, *the Maestà*, now scattered across six different museums! Equally exceptional, we'll display all four panels of Simone Martini's seminal *Orsini* polyptych together for the first time since separated. There's also the reunification of Duccio's London and Boston triptychs and the reassembly of Simone Martini's remarkable altarpiece for the Palazzo Pubblico. Other major loans that have not left their Italian homes before include Pietro Lorenzetti's monumental Tarlati polyptych, and Ambrogio Lorenzetti's Annunciation.

Laura has clear aims for the exhibition. "What I hope visitors will discover is that even though these works of art are 700 years old, they're not fusty and dull. Many are dazzling with bright colour and shimmering gold, many depict moments of high drama or profound tenderness, and many are so technically accomplished that we no longer know how to replicate their making. These works of art were designed to be looked at and experienced over time. These artists were masters of detail and intricate design and as visitors come face to face with one of their works, careful looking will always be rewarded."

---

*Siena: The Rise of Painting 1300-1350, The National Gallery, 8 March–22 June 2025, nationalgallery.org.uk* ◻

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# STEP-BY-STEP studio

EVERYTHING YOU NEED TO PAINT AND CREATE

To kick off this month's How-To section, professional artists from The British Art Club talk about what they've learnt. This month is with Yorkshire oil artist

**ADELINA CANOLLI**

## 1

### Choosing your surface

Oil painting requires patience, practice and an understanding of the right techniques and materials. The surface you choose influences your painting technique, visual effect and the artwork's longevity. I usually paint on canvas and wooden boards, as they provide different textures and effects that complement various styles.

## 2

### Selecting paints and mediums

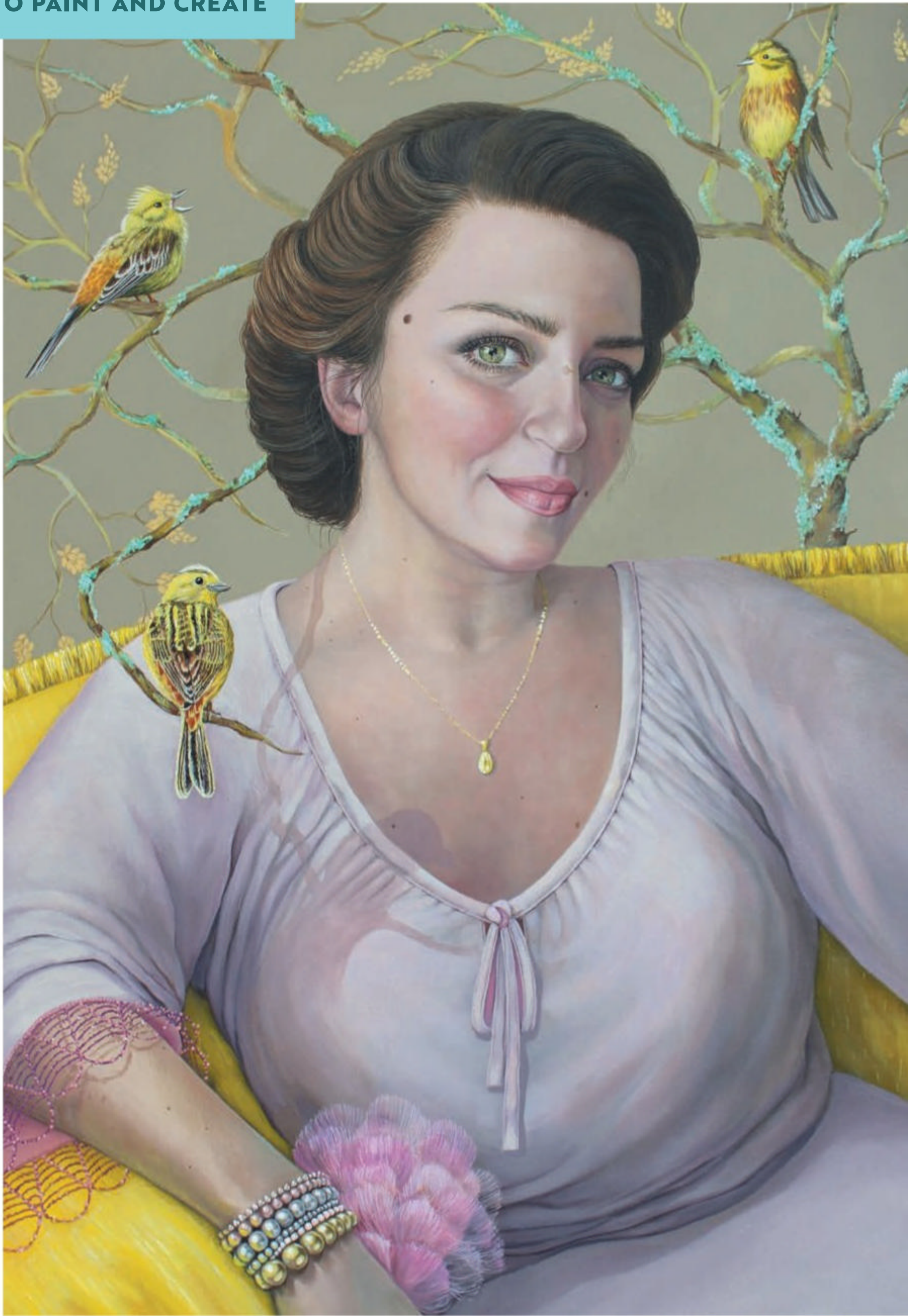
Choosing the right paints and mediums significantly impacts your painting experience and the final result. I prefer using brands like Michael Harding and Winsor & Newton for their high pigment concentration and consistency.

## 3

### Be efficient

Thoughtfully preparing your palette saves time and reduces frustration. By organising colours, mixing efficiently and maintaining cleanliness you streamline your workflow and maintain creative focus. With these preparations in place, you're ready to start your oil painting with confidence and ease.

*adelinacanolli.com*

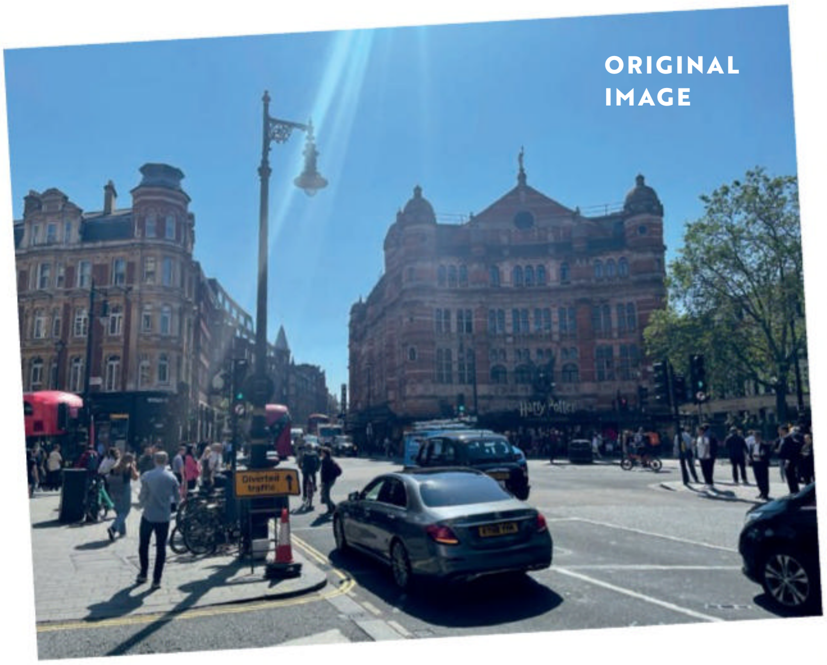


YELLOWHAMMER, OIL ON CANVAS, 100X70CM

STEP-BY-STEP

# Mastering shape

In his second instalment on working with watercolour, **ALVARO CASTAGNET** talks about the importance of shape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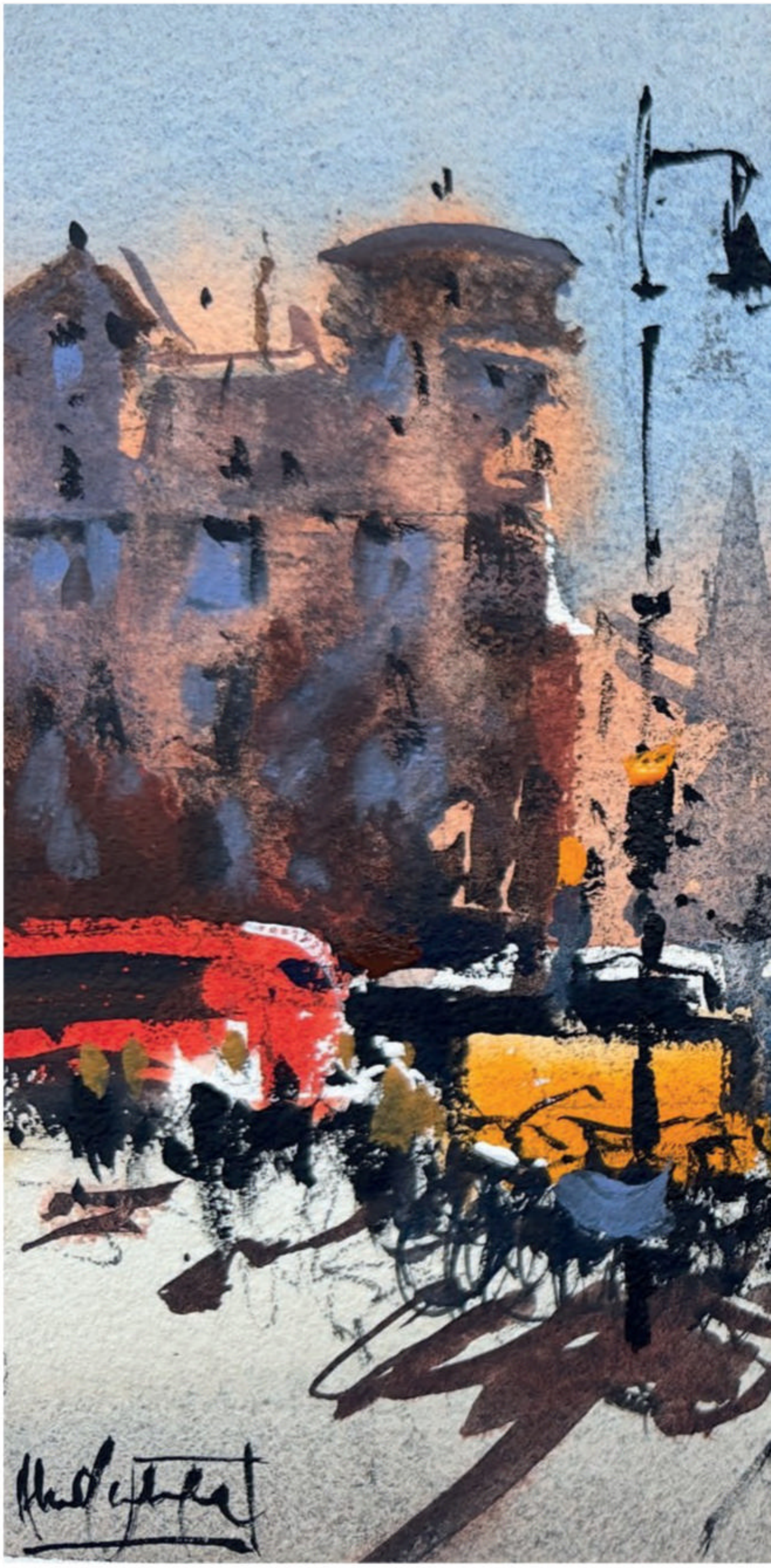


SHAPE IS THE BACKBONE OF A GREAT PAINTING, providing structure, focus and balance. Clarity in composition is paramount for creating visually compelling artwork. Breaking down a scene into small, medium and large shapes helps reveal the overall structure, enabling bold, impactful designs that emphasise form and contrast over detail.

In this step-by-step demonstration, I bring the bustling Palace Theatre in London to life by building shapes with confident washes, thoughtful edges and strategic highlights. This story showcases how shapes guide the viewer's eye to create a strong and vibrant painting.

Shapes are an important part of the composition puzzle. Shapes are the foundation of a successful painting. Placing small shapes next to larger ones creates rhythm, movement and energy. Trust your instincts, keep shapes simple, and let the painting flow naturally.

*alvarocastagnet.net* ▸

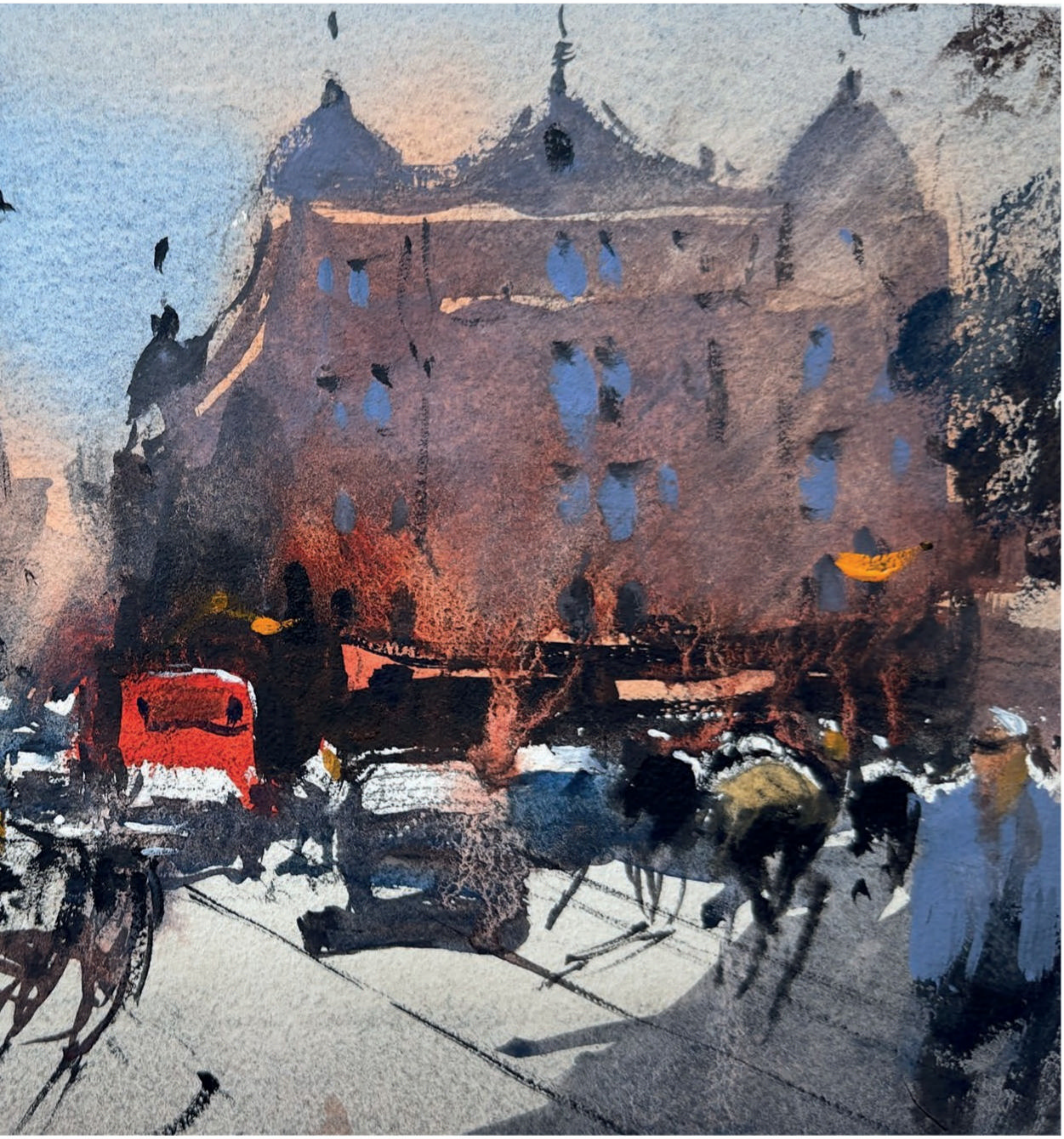
## ALVARO'S MATERIALS

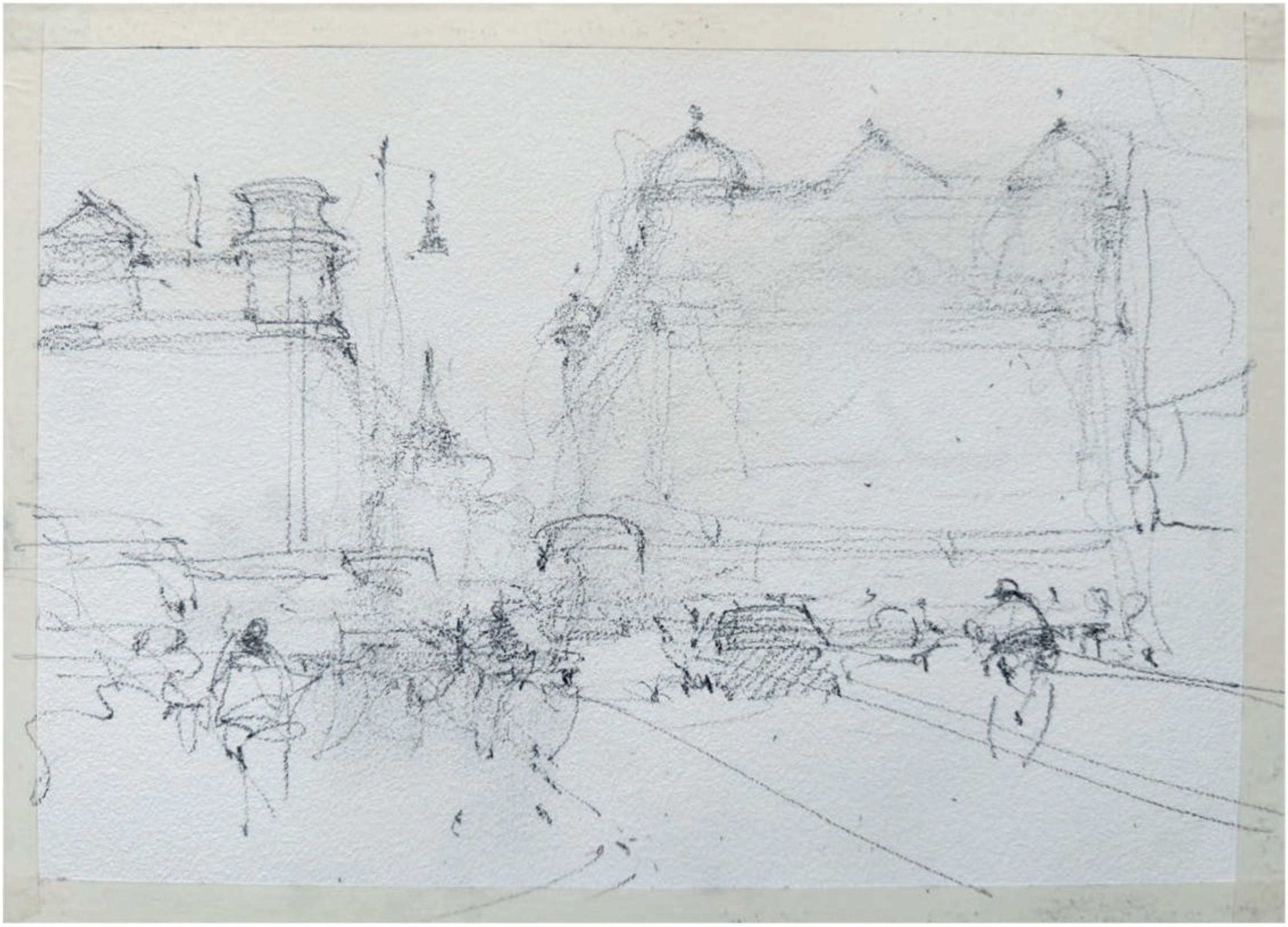
**Paints**
Burnt Sienna Light, Cobalt Blue, Lunar Blue, Pyrrol Red, Al Fresco Grey, Lunar Black, Permanent Yellow Deep, Lavender

**Brushes**
Mop #4, #2, small flat brush, and a rigger or needle-fine brush

**Support**
Baohong 300gsm rough paper
4B pencil
Hair dryer
Sponge

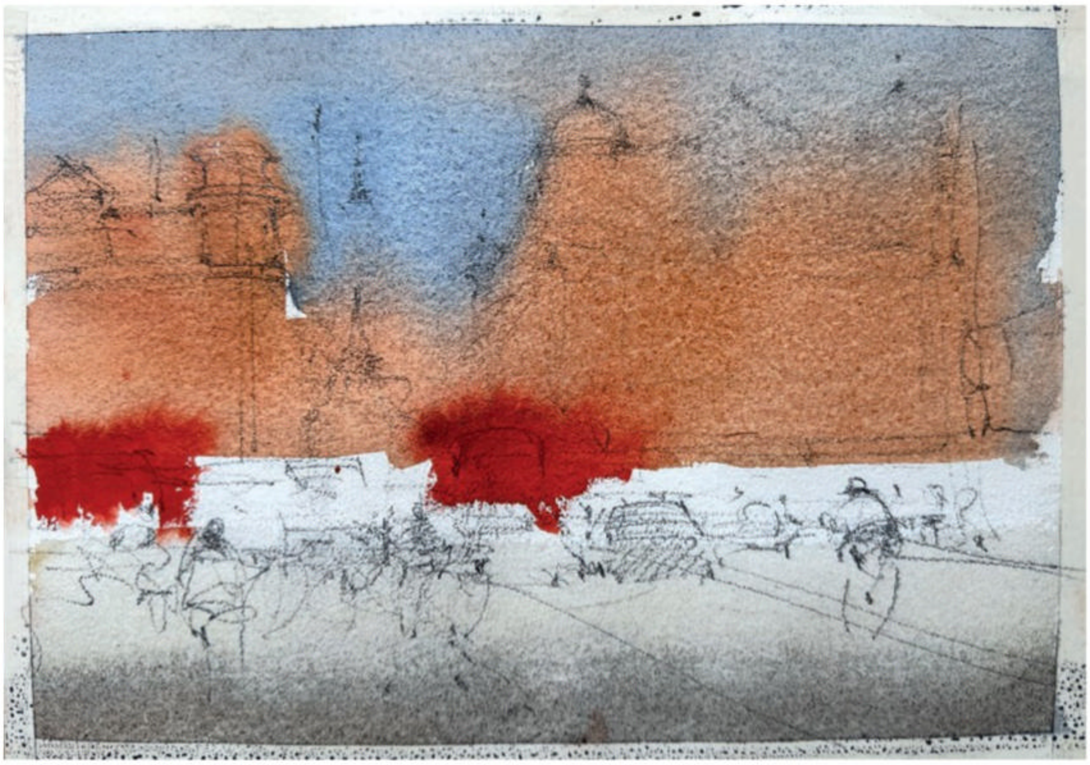
# in watercolour





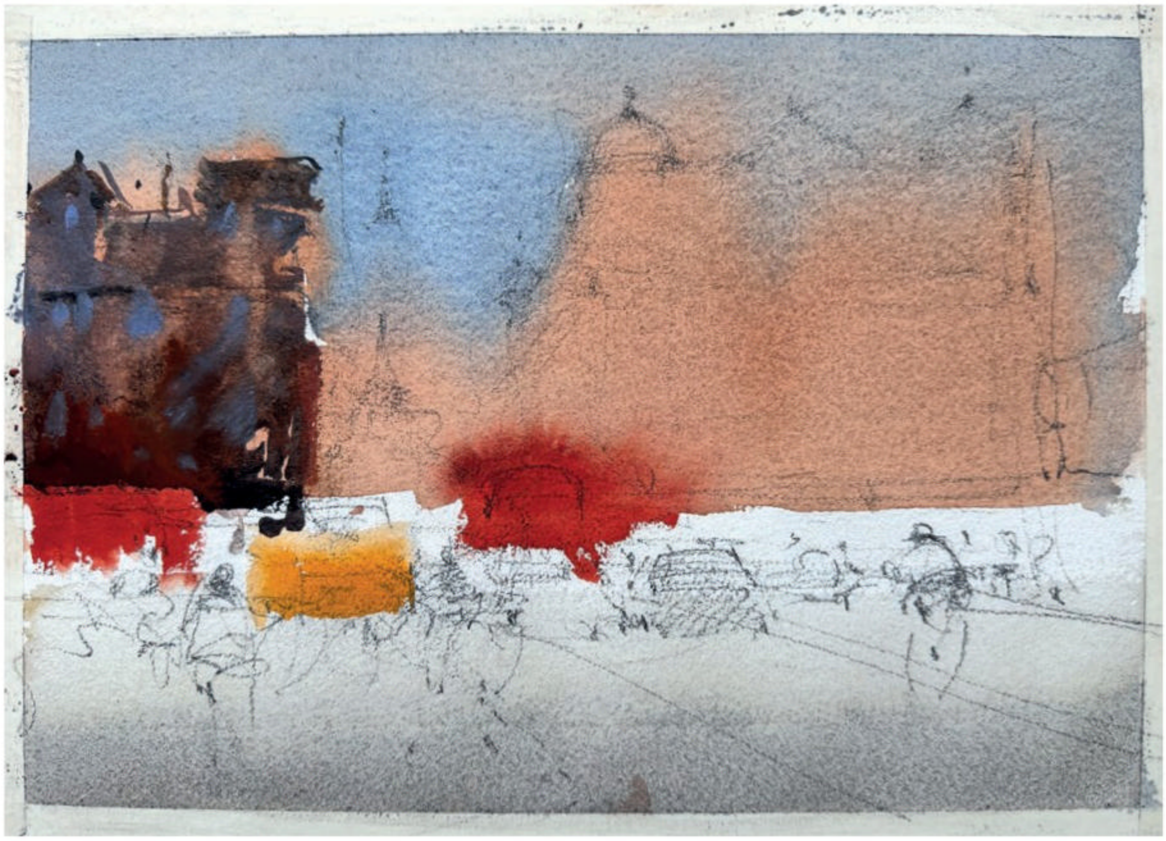
## 1 SKETCHING THE FOUNDATION

Secure the paper tightly with masking tape to a light but firm board. Begin with a loose 4B pencil sketch to establish major volumes and set the focal point. Before starting, it's crucial to have a clear vision of the message you want to convey. Plan your composition by analysing the subject and thinking in terms of shapes, small, medium, and large, and how they interconnect to form a cohesive pattern. Squint your eyes to simplify the scene and focus on balancing shapes rather than details. In this case, the large shape (the Palace Theatre) guides the viewer's eye; the side building (medium shape) creates a dynamic connection, and smaller shapes (buses, bikes, signs, and figures) hold interest in key areas. Here, I have placed a bike rider moving towards the focal point as a compositional strategy to reinforce the viewer's journey in the direction of the centre of interest.



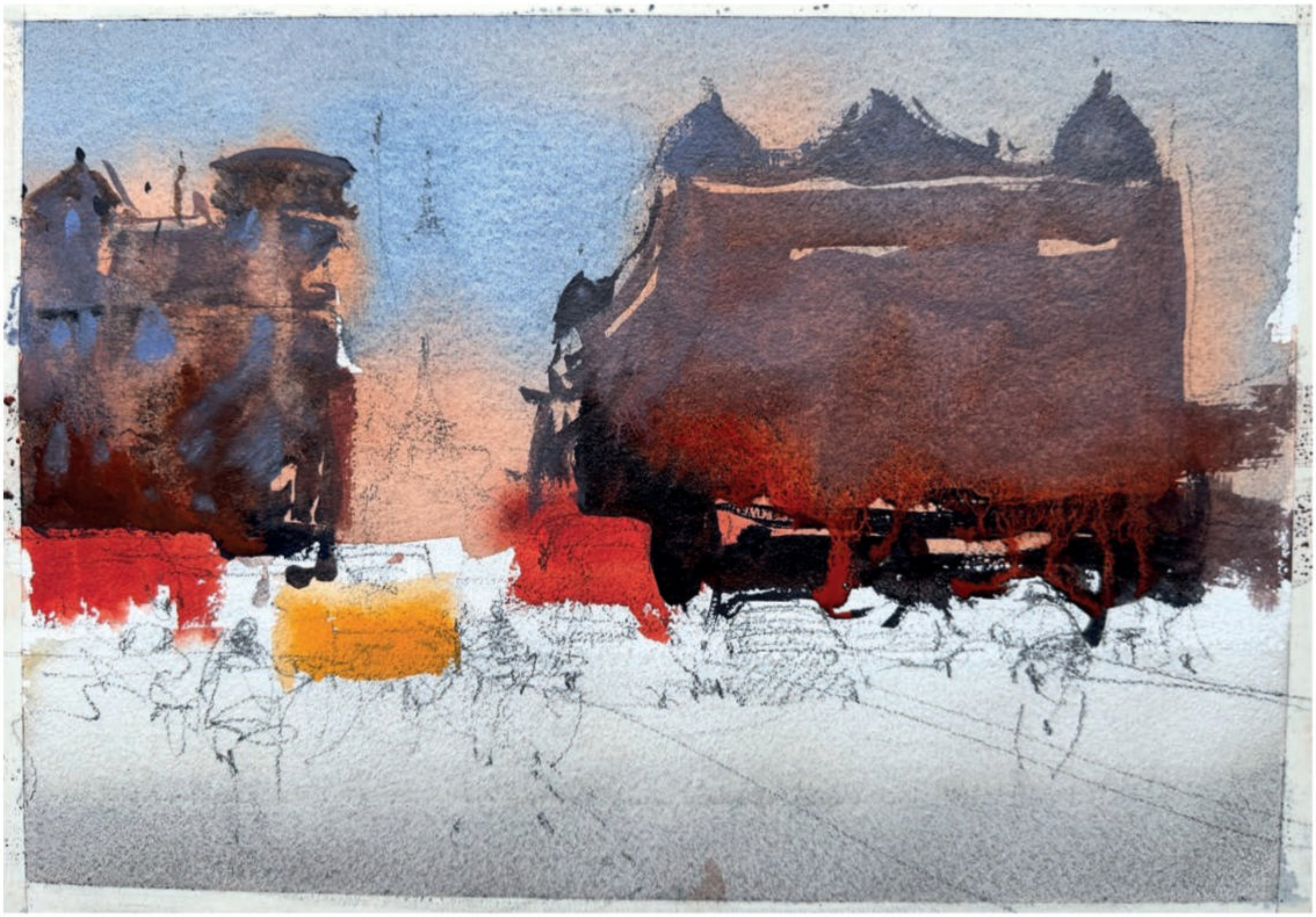
## 2 FIRST WASHES: SETTING THE ATMOSPHERE

Lay down the initial washes to define the light and mood. Use Burnt Sienna Light for the main buildings and Cobalt Blue for the sky. Introduce Pyrrol Red to suggest the iconic London buses. Apply Lunar Black with a hint of Burnt Sienna Light on the road, intensifying the value toward the foreground to create texture and light on the pavement. Keep the strokes confident and the edges soft to seamlessly integrate them.



## 3 ADDING CHARACTER

Once the base washes are dry, paint the left-hand building. Since the scene is 'into the light,' leave small gaps in the wash to mimic light filtering through, adding a natural glow and enhancing the atmosphere. Use a mix of Al Fresco Grey and Burnt Sienna Light in equal proportions for a neutral tone. While the wash is still wet, add hints of Lavender to suggest windows. A stroke of Permanent Yellow Deep can simulate a sign and draw attention to the focal point.

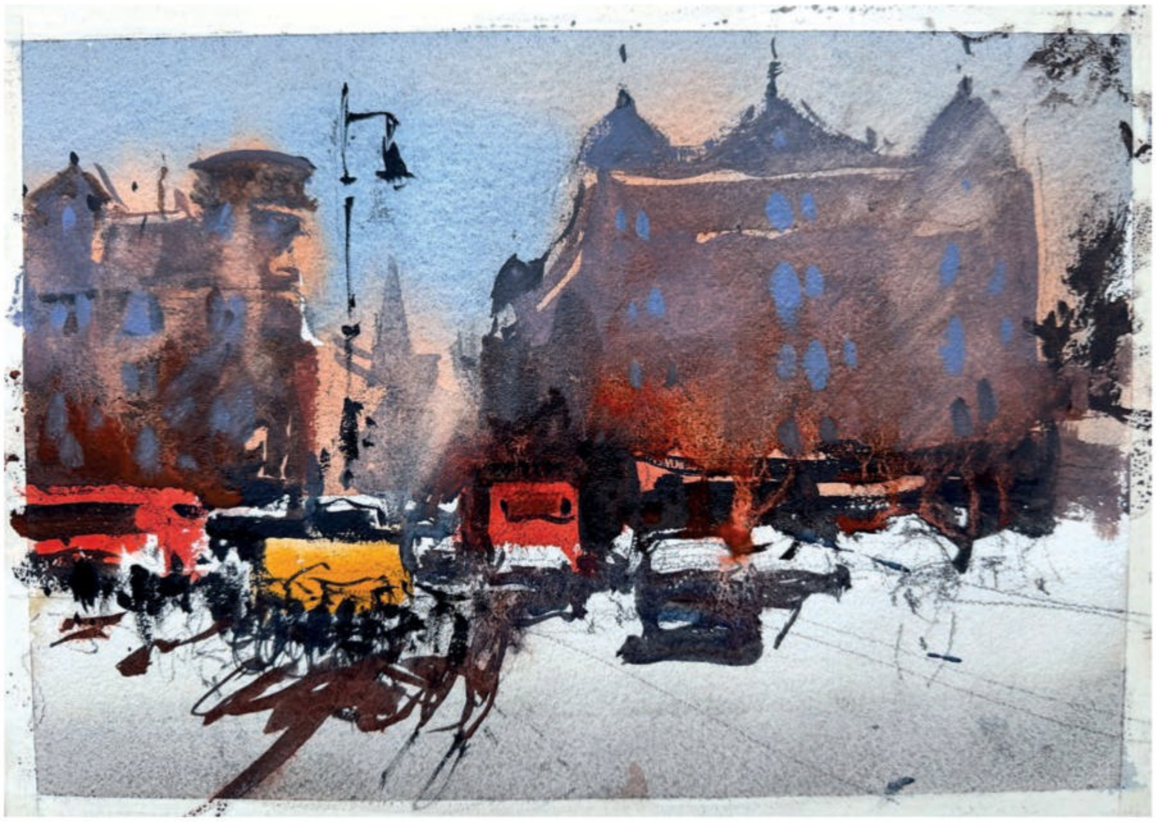


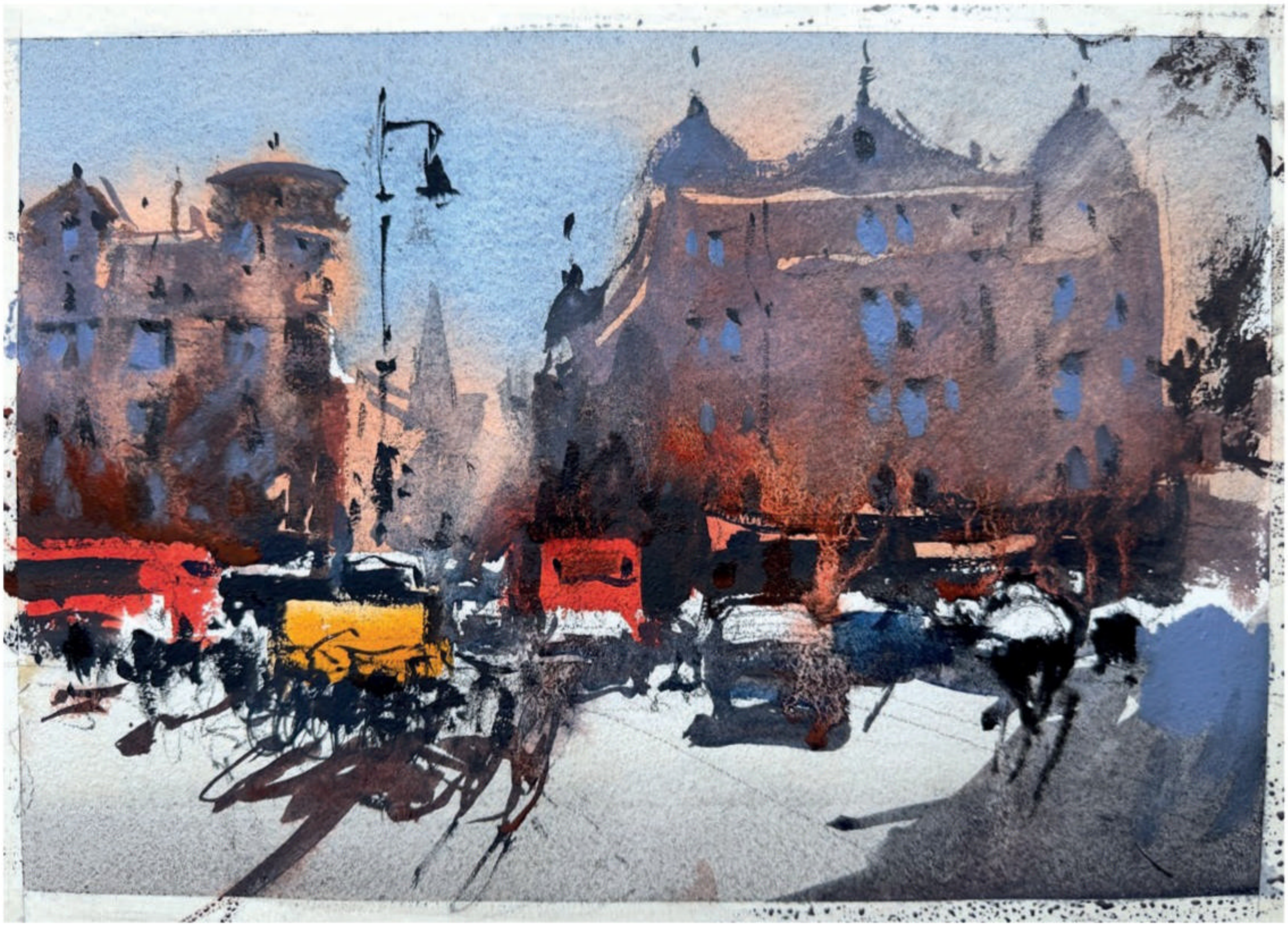
## 4 BUILDING VOLUME: NEUTRALISED COLOURS

Shape the theatre and surrounding buildings by blending Burnt Sienna Light with Al Fresco Grey in equal parts. This neutralised mixture softens the intensity while preserving warmth and depth. Leave small unpainted areas to emphasise the backlit effect on the facade. Allow the washes to blend seamlessly, creating a sense of volume and light. Add hints of Lavender to cool down the roof shapes. Use an intense mixture of Lunar Black, Burnt Sienna Light and Al Fresco Grey to define the base of the building, areas under the awnings, and around the buses as negative shapes, highlighting details like bikes and car windshields without overcomplicating the scene. ▸

## 5 DEFINING THE FAÇADE: TEXTURE AND SHAPES

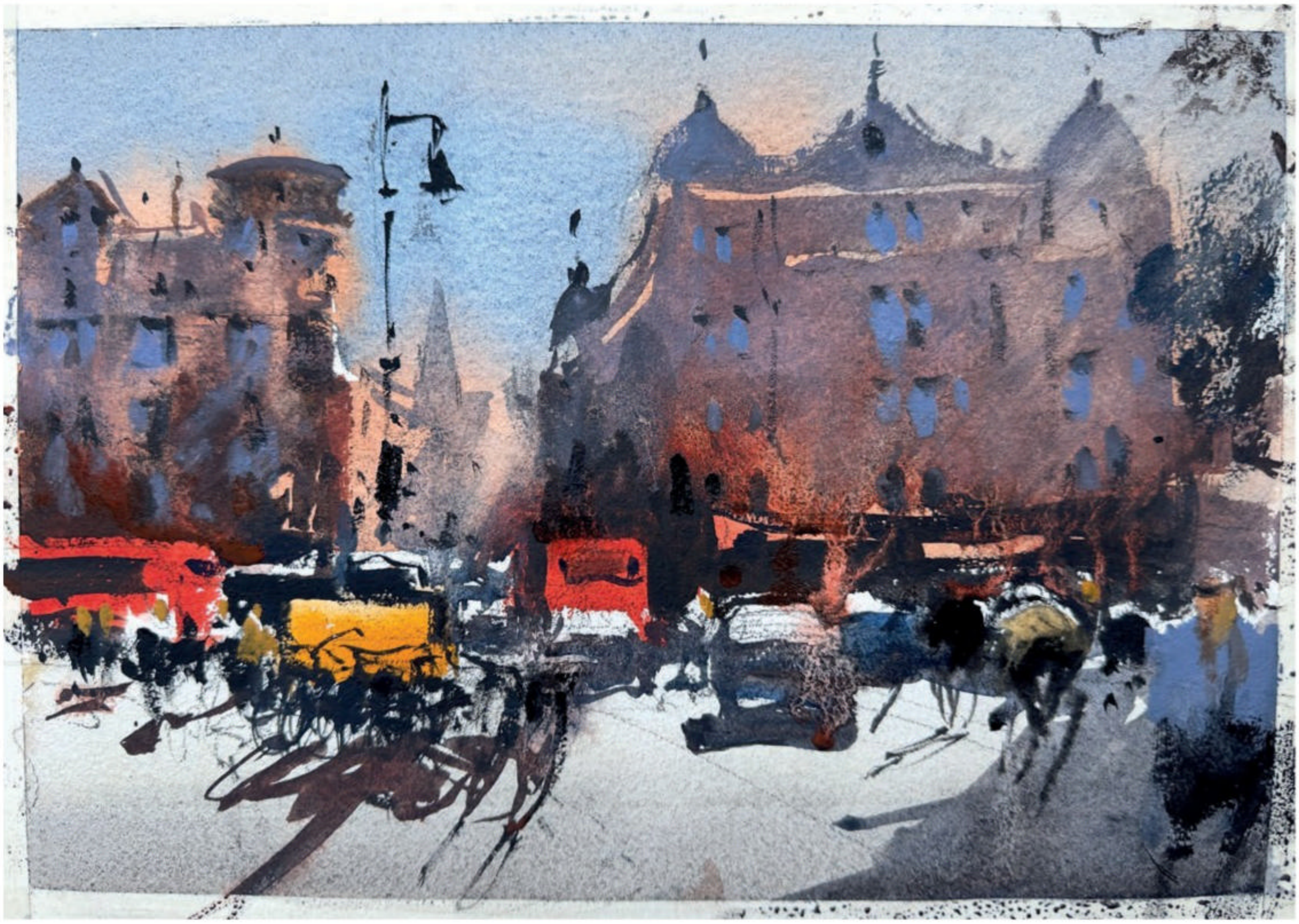
Finalise the building details with texture and richness. Use a blend of Burnt Sienna Light and Al Fresco Grey, incorporating touches of Lunar Black for depth. Suggest texture beneath the awnings while keeping the shapes fluid. Use short, loose brushstrokes of pale Lavender for windows, adding subtle details. Adding darks anchors the composition, enhances contrast and guides the eye.





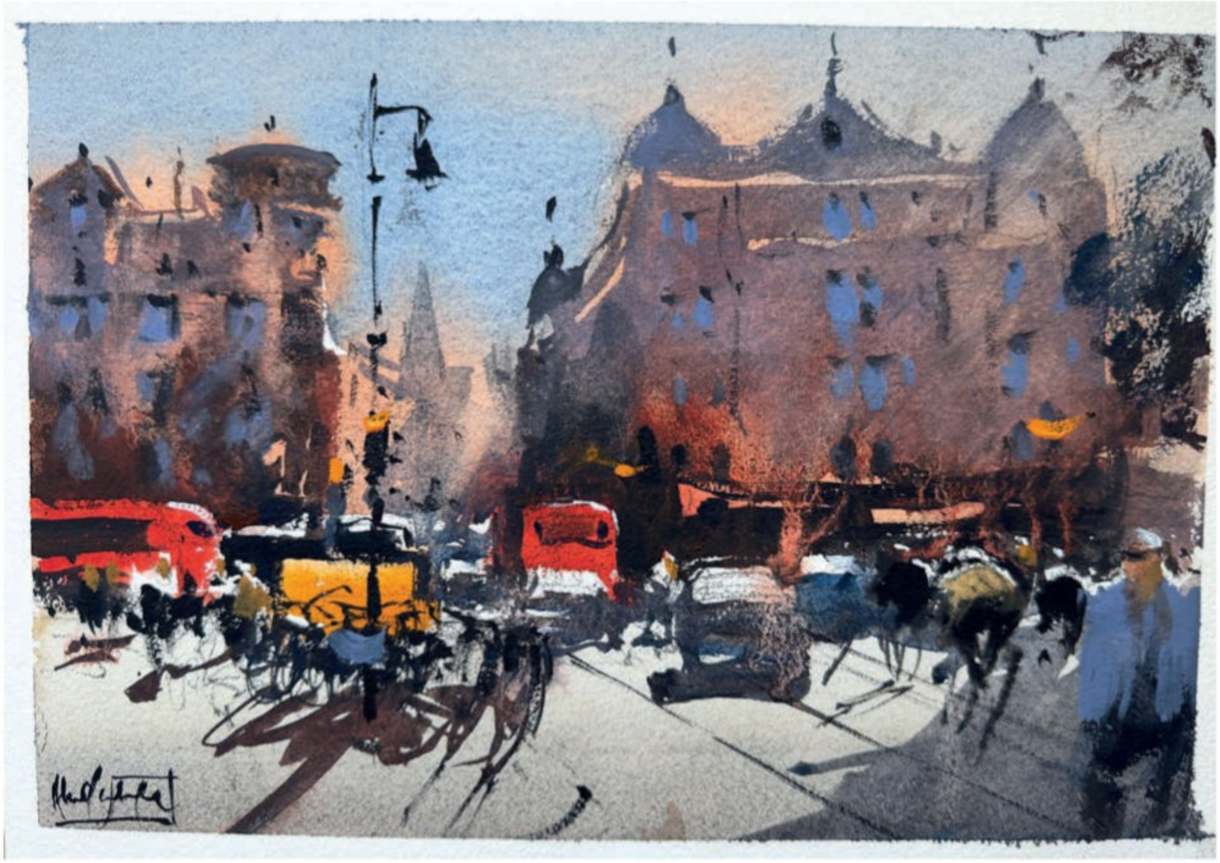
## 6 ADDING DEFINITION: BALANCING LIGHT AND DARK

Use Al Fresco Grey with a hint of Burnt Sienna Light for shadows, applied in directional strokes to emphasise perspective and light direction. Add a large figure to balance the smaller shapes and avoid monotony. Introduce a pop of Cadmium Yellow Light on a cyclist to balance darker values and add energy to the composition.



### 7 ESTABLISHING SHADOWS: DIRECTION OF LIGHT

Add long, soft shadows to reinforce the light direction. Use Al Fresco Grey for these, making sure they remain slightly lighter than the darkest darks to maintain balance. Extend shadows toward the foreground to connect shapes and enhance the depth and space of the scene.



### 8 FINISHING TOUCHES: LAVENDER HIGHLIGHTS

Unify the painting with subtle Lavender highlights. Its opacity makes it ideal for adding vibrancy to windows and figures. Use it sparingly to harmonise elements. Add small pops of colour, like orange for traffic lights, to enhance the overall vibrancy and mood. □

# Looking up

**JANE FRENCH** shows you how she created this engaging portrait of a fellow artist in oil

## JANE'S MATERIALS

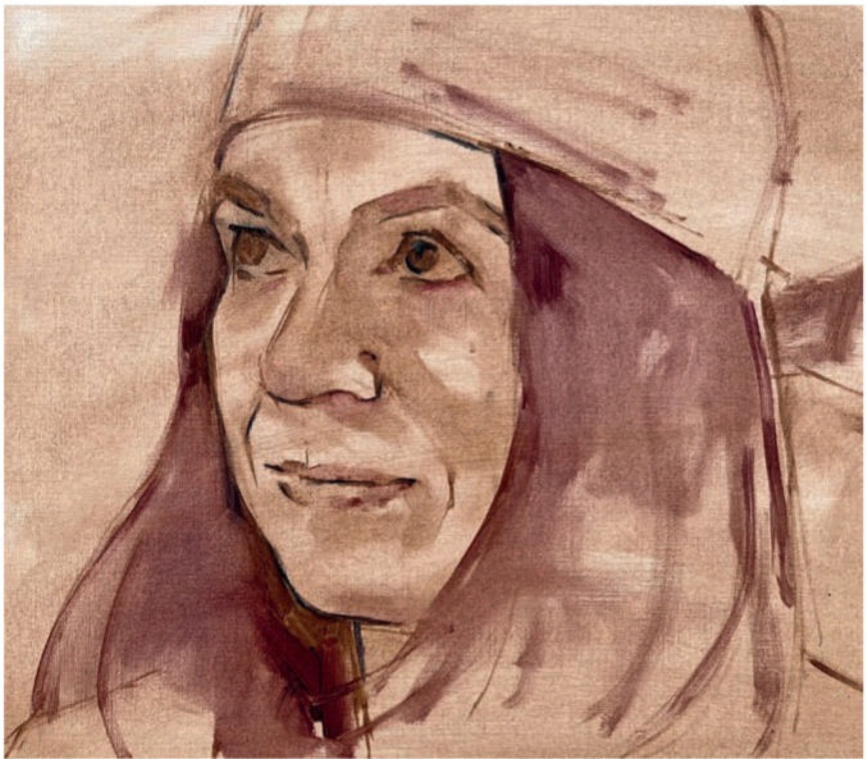
**Paint**
Oil: Titanium White, Burnt Umber, Lemon Yellow Hue, Yellow Ochre, Cadmium Red Hue, Permanent Rose, Magenta, Cerulean Blue Hue, French Ultramarine, Ivory Black
Acrylic: Burnt Umber

**Brushes**
Synthetic oil brushes: short/flat in sizes 5mm, 8mm, 1cm, 1.5cm, Rigger brush for details

**Support**
A3 Canvas Artboard
Studio-safe solvent (for thinning paint and cleaning brushes)

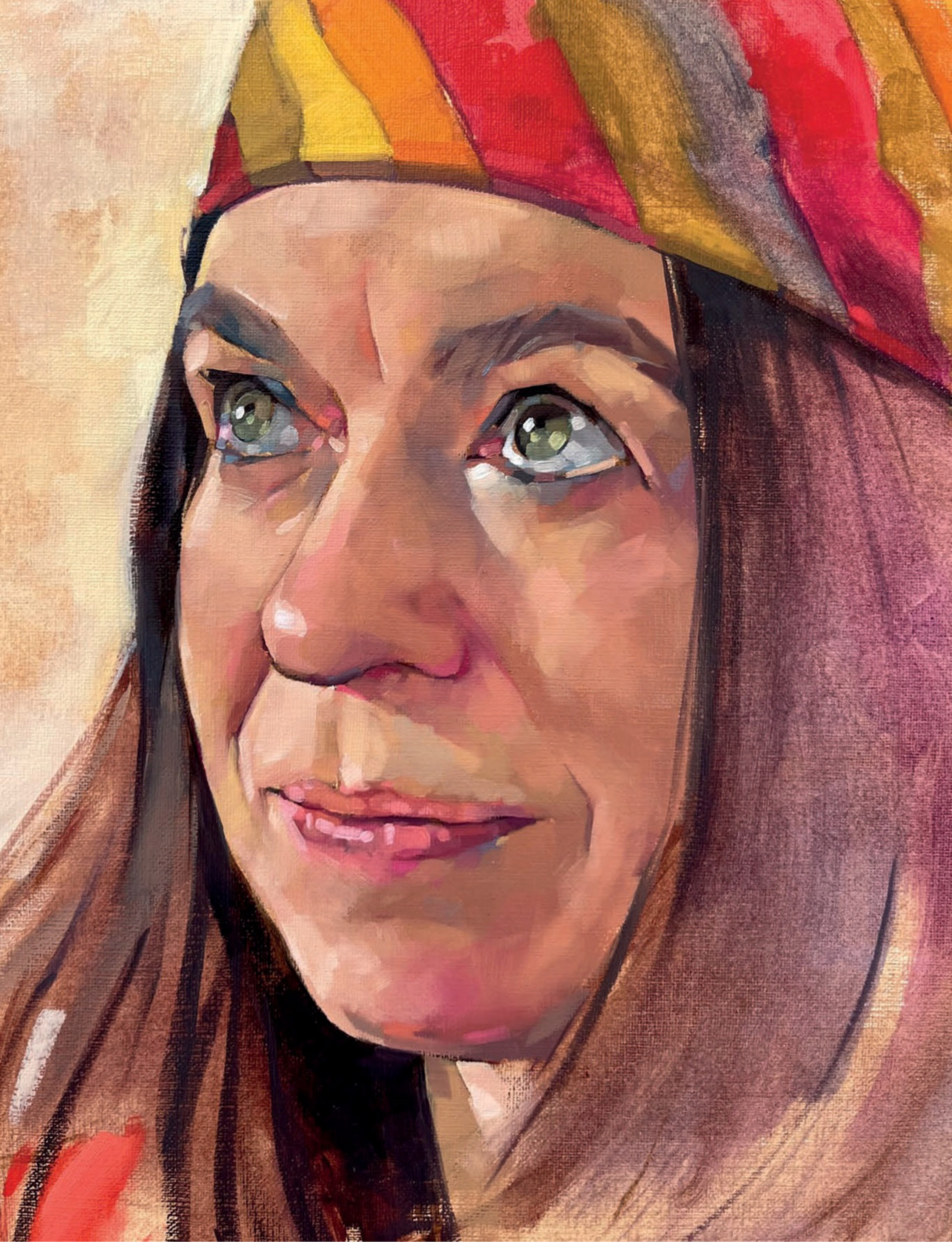
**Palette**
Jar with solvent in for cleaning brushes
Jar lid with solvent in for thinning paint
Rags, Easel

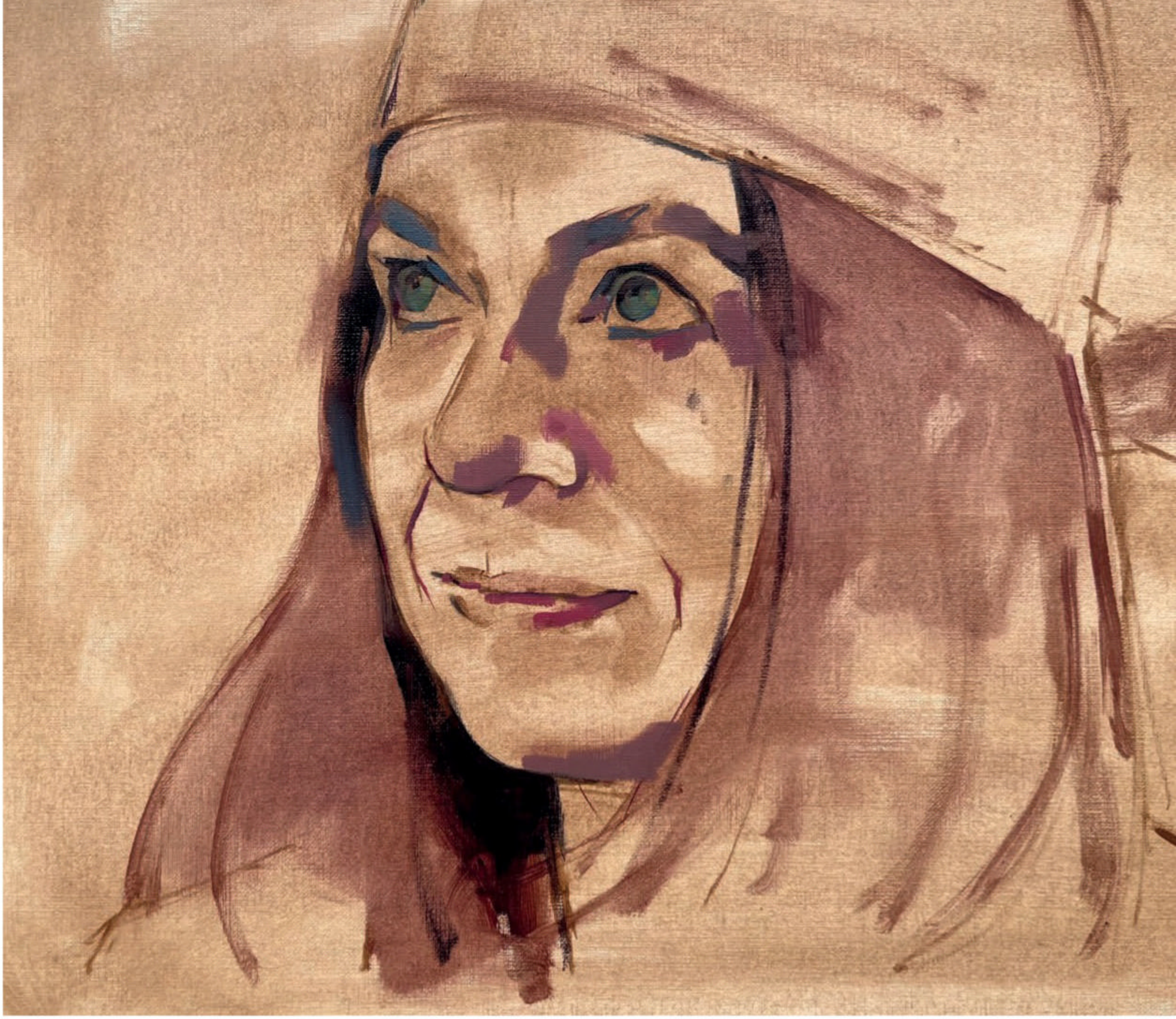
THIS IS A PORTRAIT OF FELLOW ARTIST, Georgia. Last year I painted a study of her from a live sitting and also took a few photos of her wearing several different outfits and accessories. I particularly liked this image of her dressed in a colourful headscarf and looking upwards in this intriguing way. I've always loved colour and pattern, and it was very appealing to have all those bold stripes so close to her face. Towards the latter stages of working on the portrait, I realised that what might be most effective would be to leave parts of the painting slightly unfinished. These areas would hopefully provide a striking contrast to the more precisely painted facial features, as well as to the geometric nature of the headscarf. I'm often asked about when and how I make decisions relating to background and this is a good example of how things can often be quite flexible, especially with a study or a smaller work. I am also sometimes questioned about the choice of sitter for a portrait, and I realised, when working on this one, that I really love painting someone I know well. Firstly, it's so much easier to see when something is wrong; a feature, an angle, an expression; secondly, it's a great opportunity to spend time with a friend!



## 1 THE GROUND AND THE DRAWING

The first stage of any oil painting for me is the preparation of a ground. A coloured ground is a layer of paint that stains the entire surface of a painting before other layers are applied. In this case, I wanted to paint on a white surface so I applied a neutral stain of Burnt Umber acrylic paint. I do this to remove the stark white, but to also create a mid-tone base that helps me to judge values. The second stage is to do my drawing. I use thinned-down Burnt Umber oil paint for my drawing and employ a combination of both detailed and looser (tonal) marks until there is enough information down to allow me to progress to the painting stage. Once I've completed the drawing, I will pre-mix a set of helpful skin-tone values. ▶



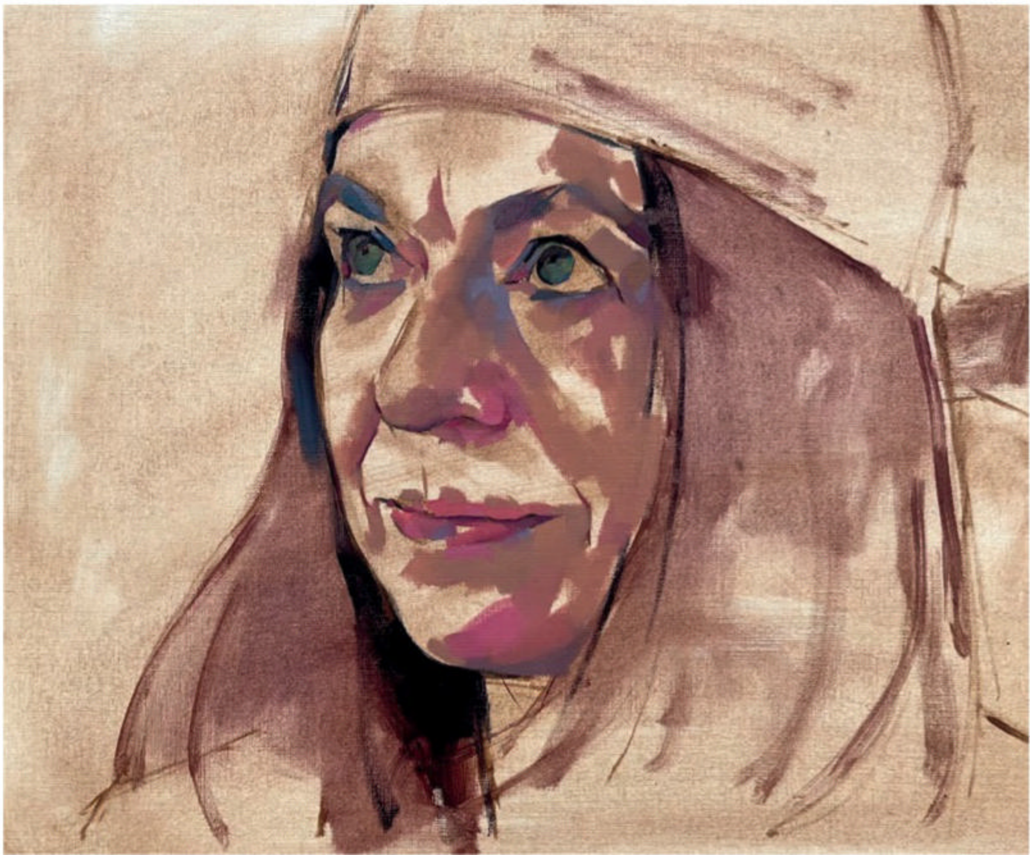


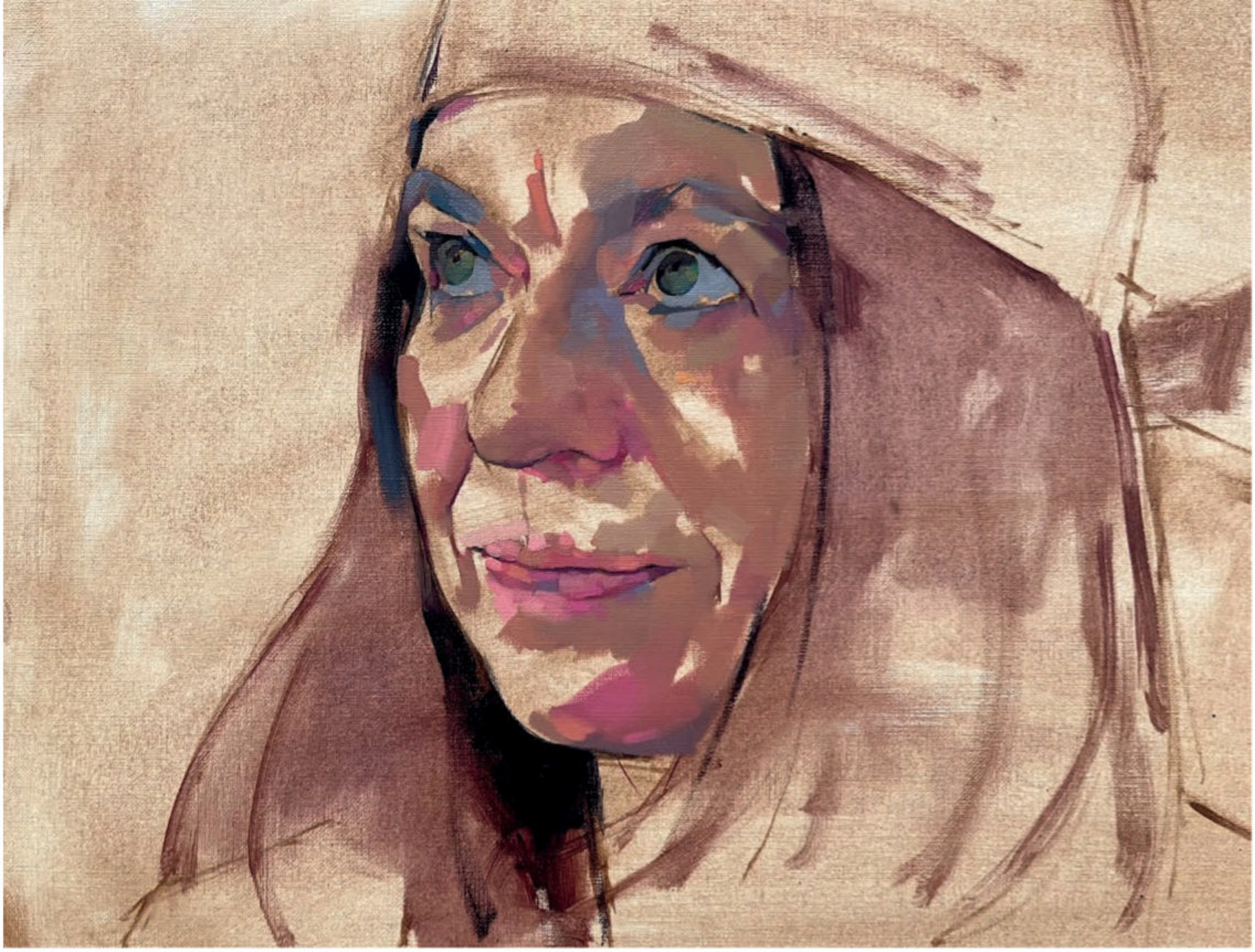
## 2 START APPLYING THE PAINT ▲

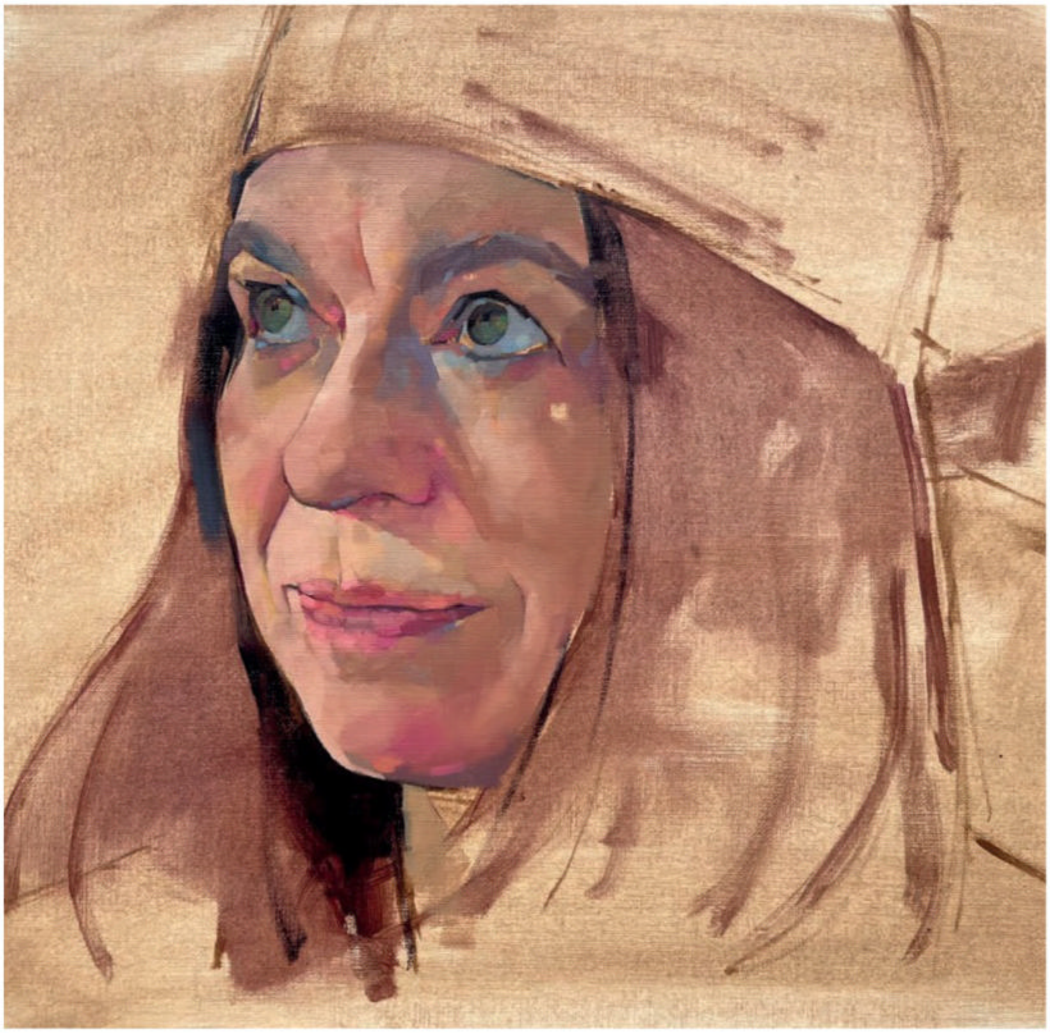
For me, the drawing is so important: by creating a fairly detailed structure, I'm able to quickly check that proportions are correct and then easily adjust them. After my initial drawing, I start applying a thicker (creamier) consistency of paint and begin with the darkest areas: eyes, mouth, nostrils, plus any deep shadows.

## 3 PUSH THE VIBRANCY OF YOUR COLOURS

After applying the darkest – and to some extent, most important – areas, I move on to applying paint to the next value-level areas. These are often still pretty dark and generally still in shadow. I try not to focus on one particular area of the face. I usually leave the hair and clothing until much later but in this portrait, I painted some of the dark areas of her hair to help me improve the drawing of the facial outlines. At all stages, I try to push the vibrancy of my colours whilst still maintaining the correct value levels.





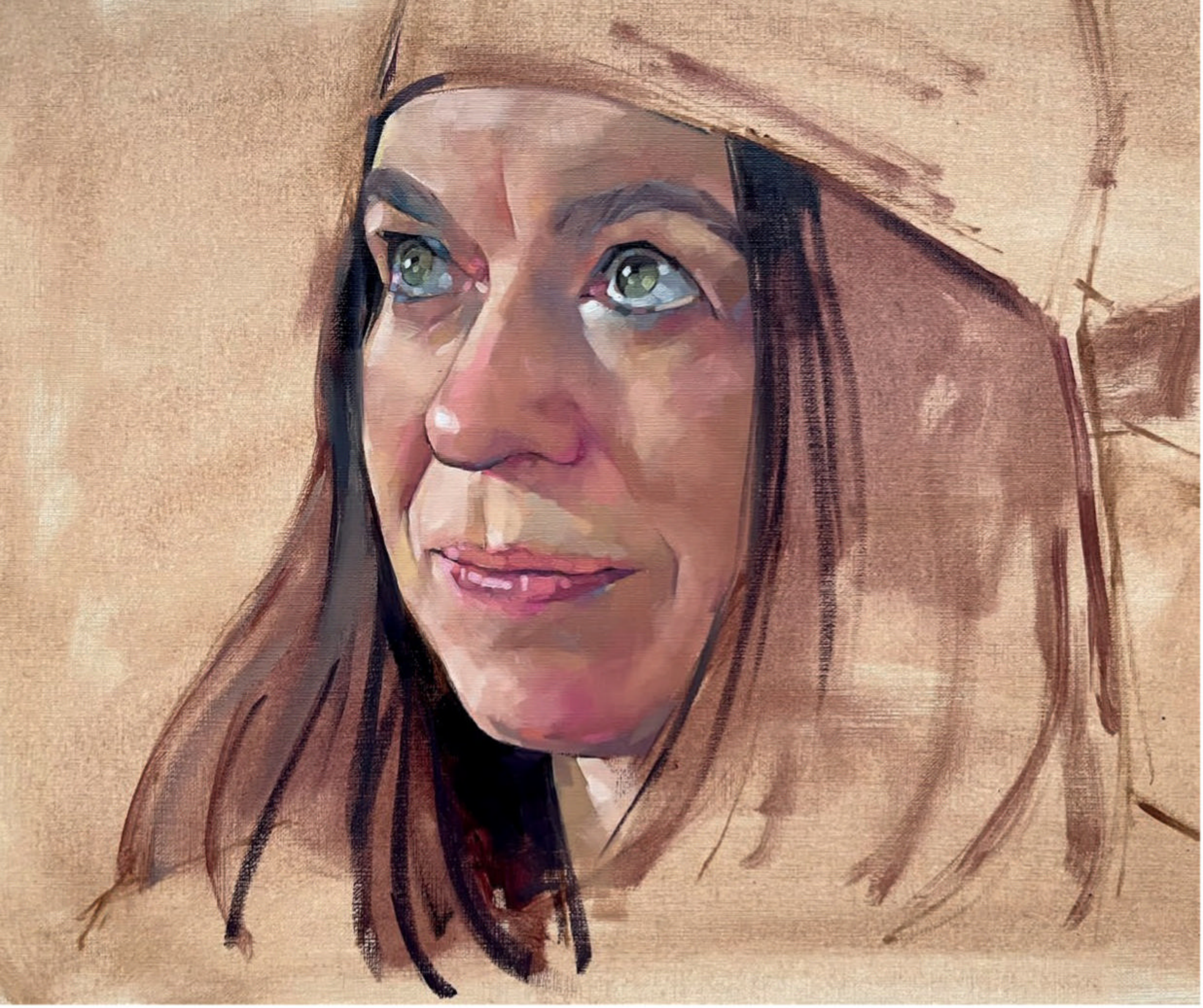


### 4 CHECK YOUR VALUES ▲

I've started to move gradually towards lighter – and brighter – areas. I refer to this stage as the mid-tones but often I will work on sections that may be partially lit up. The whites of the eyes are blocked in because they enable me to add lighter values over the top. At any point when painting a portrait, I may adjust areas to make sure they are the correct value. I'm constantly comparing value-to-value and making sure that the painting is working as a whole.

### 5 THE TONAL AREAS

The next stage of my painting is adding lighter tonal areas. Now I've blocked in practically all of the surface of the face. This allows me to very easily see where the highlights – or lightest areas – need to be applied. It also enables me to see where the painting needs tweaking with regard to the dark areas. I work with a relatively thin layer of pretty thick paint and this means it's fairly easy to add any additional layers when required. ▸

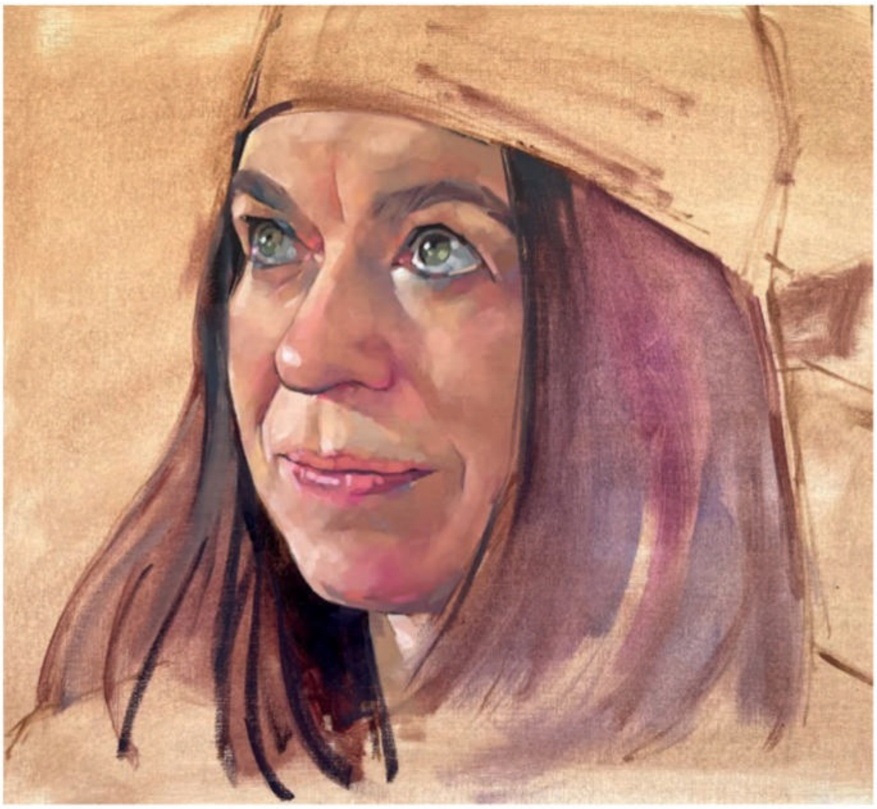


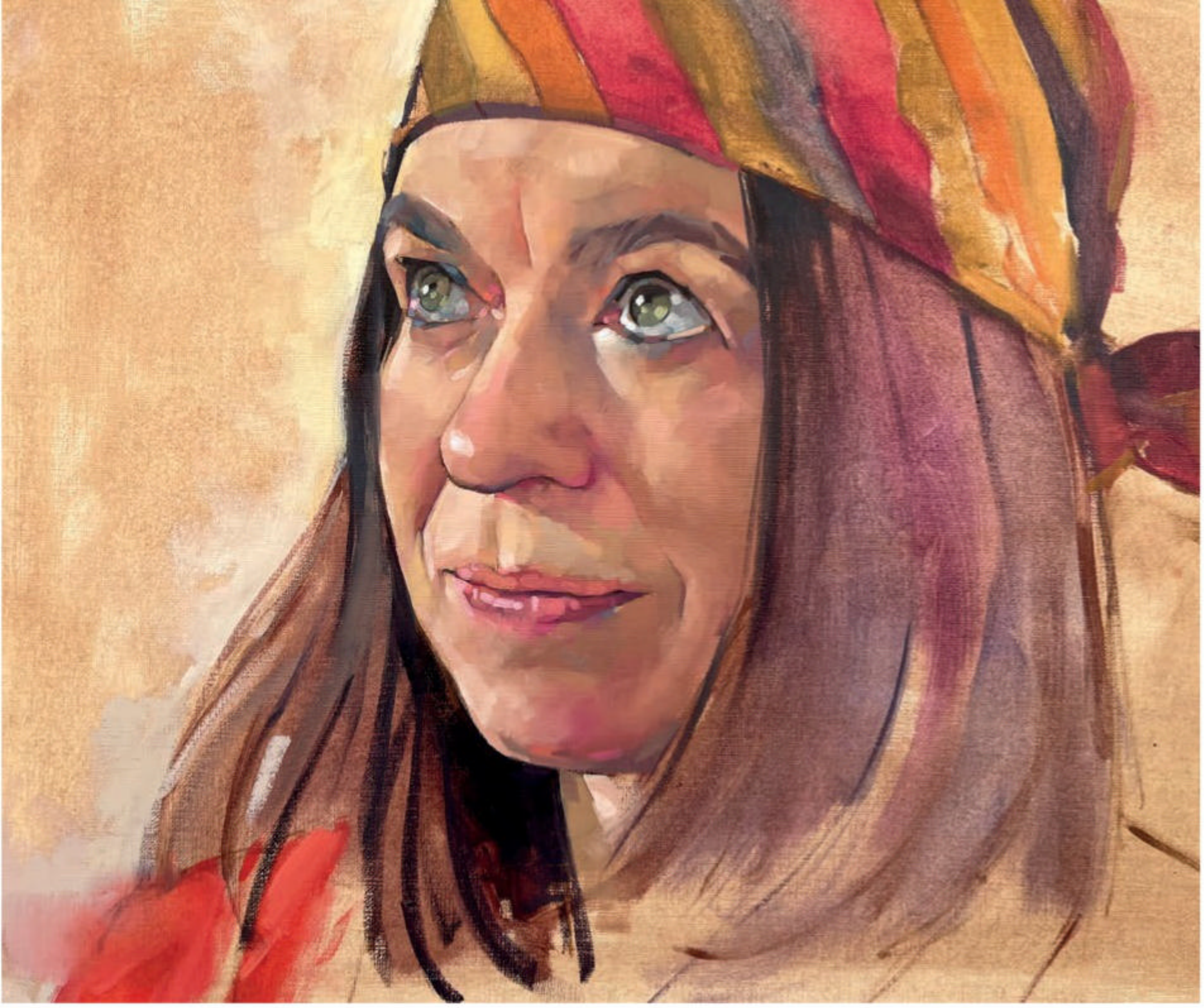
### 6 BEWARE OF MAKING HIGHLIGHTS TOO LIGHT ▲

In this image I have applied the highlights and lightest values. I often refer to these as the treat at the end. This is because they should be a fairly easy thing to do if all your values – up to this point – are more or less correct. It is important to be aware not to make the highlights too light. Also, use different hues for different highlights: ie, light grey/blue for the eyes and light pink/peach for the lips. Be very sparing with pure white. It's quite rare for white to be present in a portrait and if used incorrectly it can overpower everything else.

### 7 CONSIDER YOUR MARK-MAKING

At this point I was starting to consider whether or not to fully block in the hair, clothing and background. As mentioned earlier, I'm not always sure of this when I start – especially if working on a demo. I decided to apply some thinned-down, slightly brighter colours onto her hair, including Magenta and Ultramarine Blue. Having done this, I thought that it worked well as it was sufficiently dark enough and provided a pleasing juxtaposition of mark-making.





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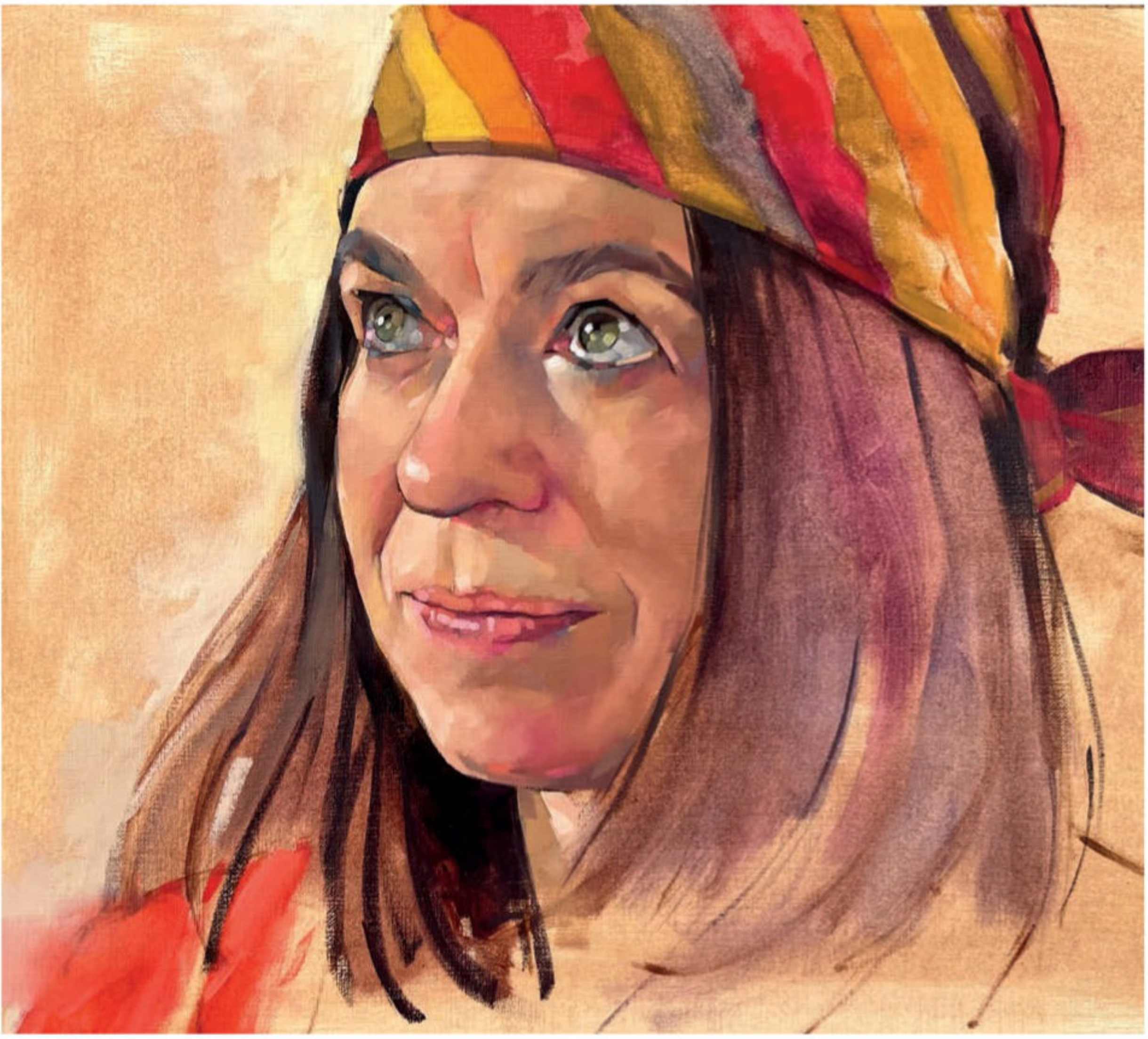
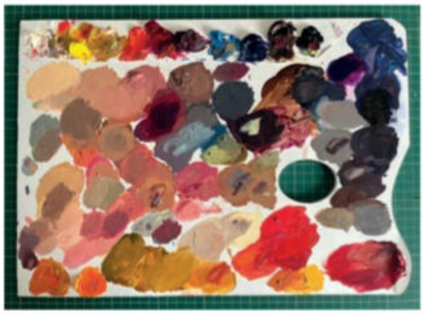
### 8 DON'T BE TOO PRECISE

I definitely wanted to include the colourful stripes of Georgia's headscarf and started by blocking them in using thinned-down versions of the colours they were in my photo reference. At this point, I also improved the edge of her hair as I thought parts of it weren't quite correct. I used a slightly lighter colour to that of the ground and, to continue with the slightly unfinished look, I decided to leave it quite sketchy in these areas too.



### 9 USE CONTRAST

This is a close-up of the completed portrait with a focus on the stripes of the headscarf. I decided to leave some of it patchy but apply a more finished level of paint on the forehead. Once again, I like the contrast this produces between the clarity of some sections and the more blurred, suggestive treatment of other areas.



### 10 THE FINAL PALETTE

This image illustrates how many combinations or mixtures of colours I create in the process of doing a portrait. Those first four pre-mixed colours are so helpful but they are simply the starting point for me and enable me to judge values more effectively. ◻

# Fountain pen ink art

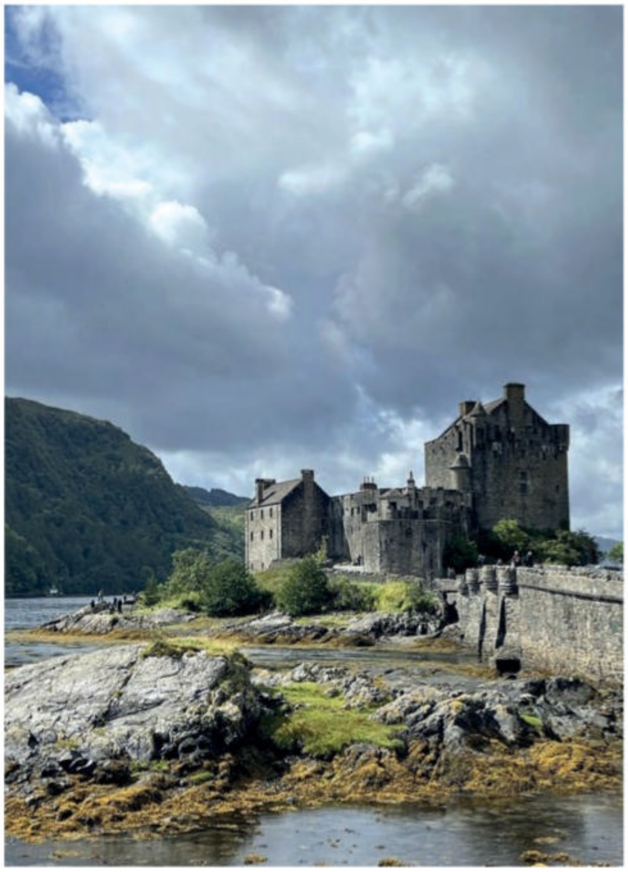
**NICK STEWART** shows you how to utilise the chromatic qualities of fountain pen ink to dramatic effect whilst using tiny amounts of bleach for highlighting and erasing

FOUNTAIN PEN INK ART is a personal project that re-imagines a product produced for a now increasingly obsolete purpose. It explores possibilities to enhance its potential for use within other creative contexts, where taking risks and making mistakes is encouraged to create exciting visual outcomes.

When a single dye-based fountain ink is applied to water on a high-quality watercolour paper, the coloured dyes that make up that ink may be released from the solution. So, although you are using one ink, several colours can be in play. The chromatic process is not only visually dramatic, but very much serendipity-led, and the beauty of the final visual outcomes is invariably dictated by this. If you then add in a touch of alchemy (bleach), the fountain pen ink goes to a whole new level with stunning neon gold effects, textures and additional colours created. Do note that every fountain pen ink is unique. Some have huge chromatic qualities while others have none and everything in between.

The project has not only had a profound effect on my approach to creating art but also has made illustration and painting techniques easier to understand and execute. As you'll find out in this tutorial, less is most definitely more, and patience is a virtue. If those two key points are adhered to, the final outcomes will always look fresh, non-contrived and magical. Have fun.

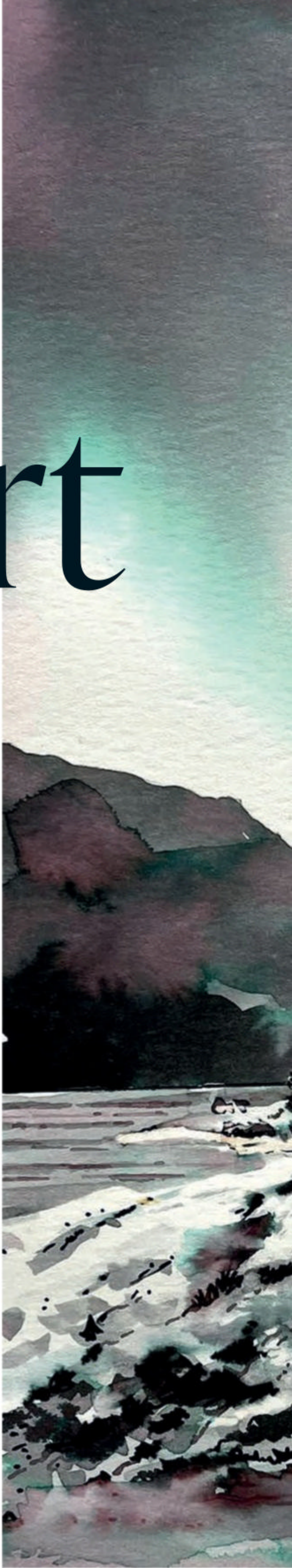
***Instagram: @quinkandbleach***

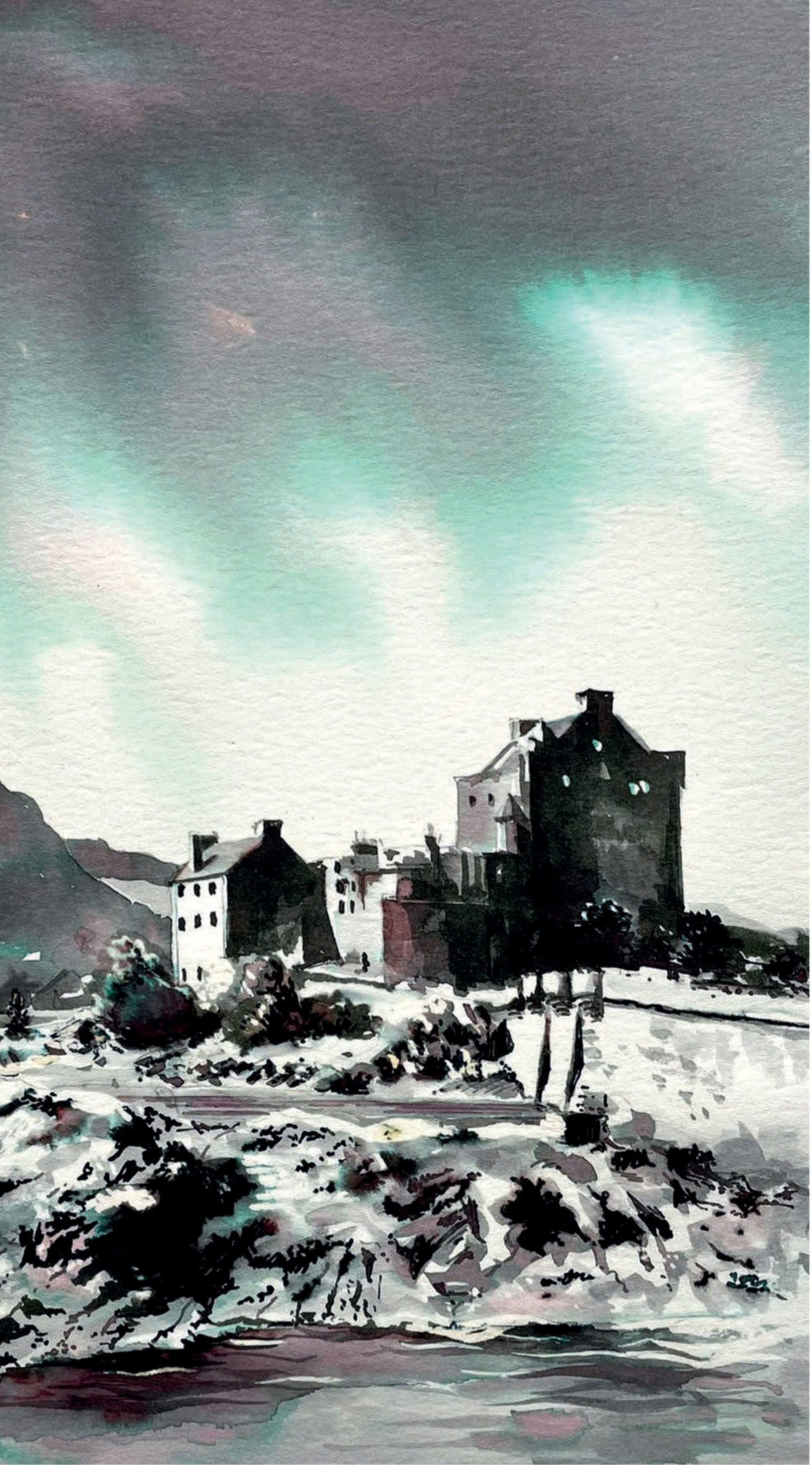


### 1

### FOCUS IN ON THE SKY

Select an image that you want to use as a starting point. Preferably one with a big sky. I have chosen an image of Eilean Donan Castle in the foreground taken by Pete Dean (@tweetadean) which is set in the majestic Scottish Highlands on the road to the Isle of Skye.





## NICK'S MATERIALS

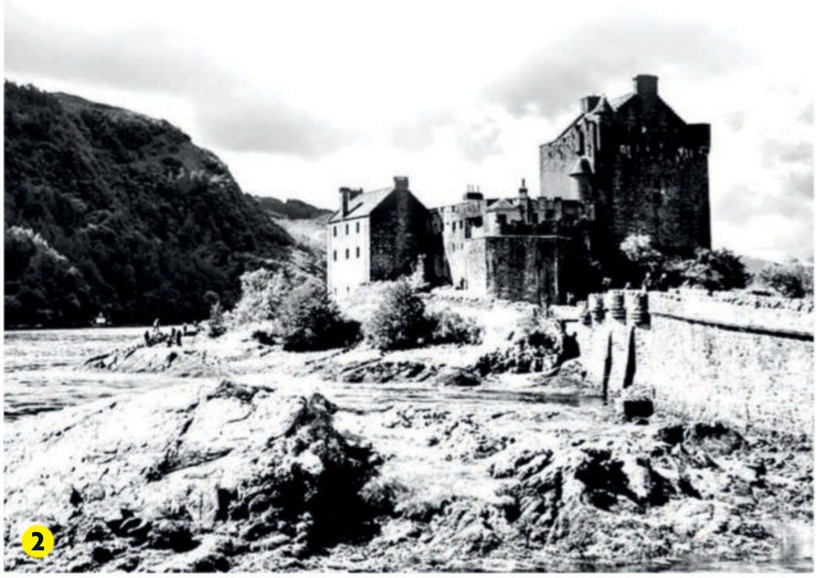
**Fountain pen ink**
Robert Oster Graphite. Also consider: Robert Oster Barossa Grape, Diamine Earl Grey or Cult Pens Matthew Fountain Pen Inks available from: cultpens.com, purepens.co.uk, diamineinks.co.uk

**Paper**
Bockingford 140lb Hot Press (smooth surface) white watercolour paper

**Brushes**
No 24 watercolour (Winsor & Newton Cotman), No 10 watercolour (Artists Discount), No 6 watercolour (Artists Discount), No 2 Half Rigger (ProArte Masterstroke)
*Please note that I only use brushes with synthetic hair. Bleach will melt animal hair!*

**Pen**
Noodler's Creaper fountain pen.

**Support**
Artboard,
masking tape
2B pencil
Putty rubber
Household bleach
Small bottle with a screw cap to hold a tiny amount of bleach
Mixing palette
Water pots and water
Roll of kitchen towel



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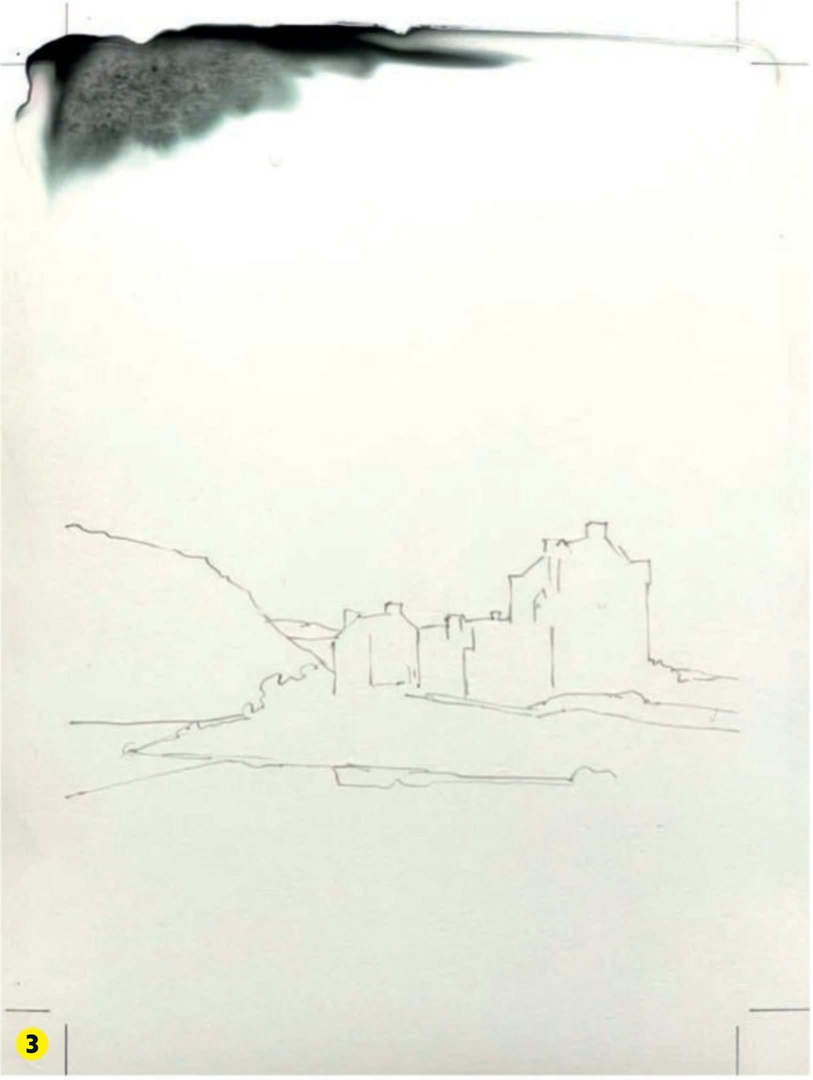

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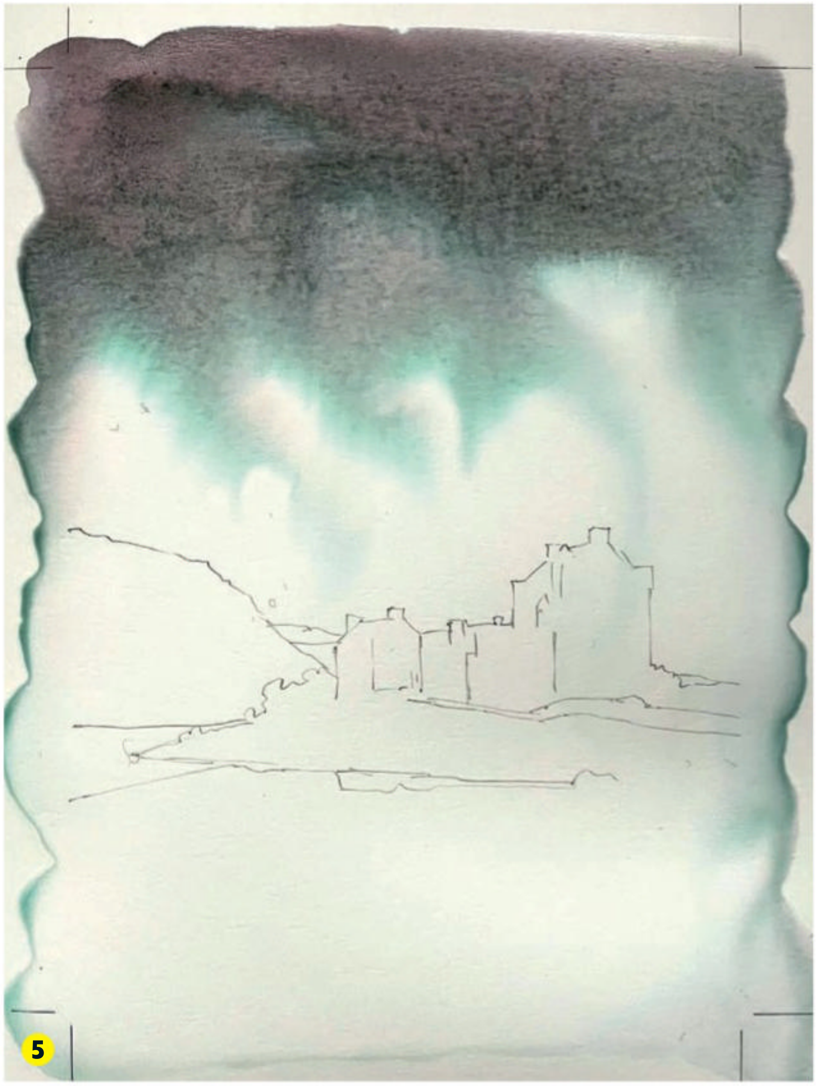

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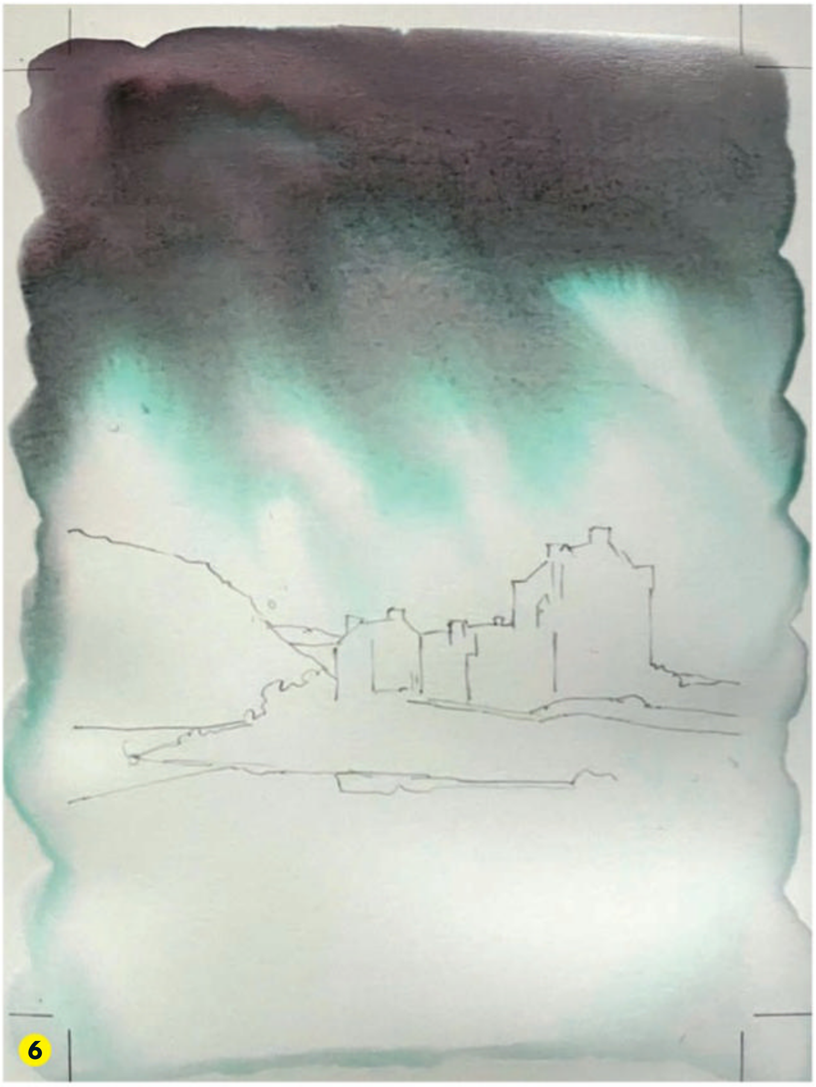

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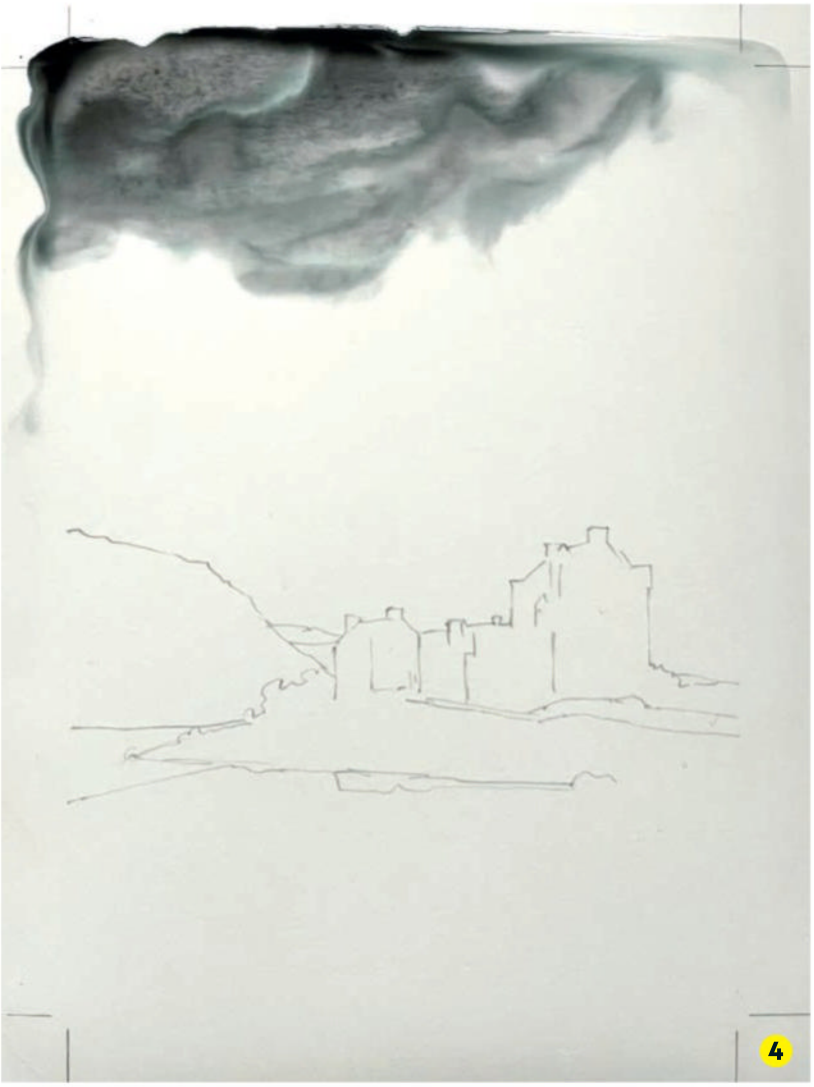
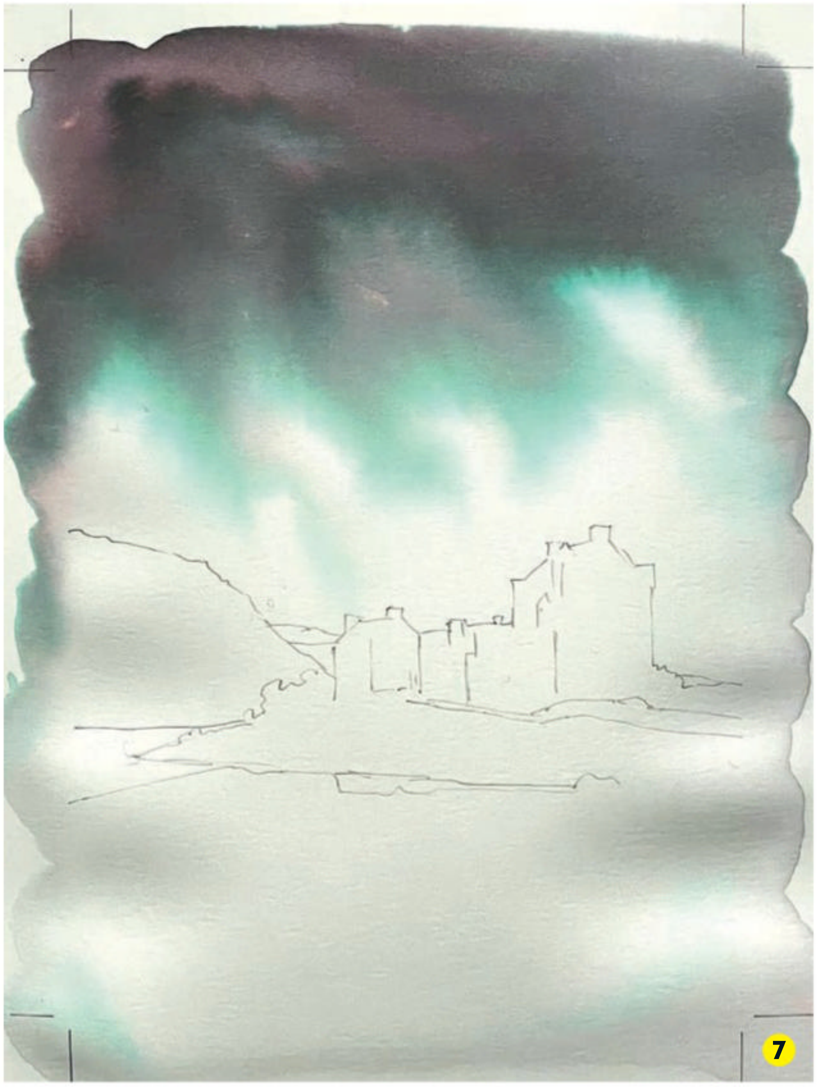




### 2 BE SPARING WITH YOUR INK

As I'm only using one ink, I'm going to be creating a monotone image so have created a high contrast black and white version of the original. This has all the key visual information that I will need.

### 3 UTILISE YOUR MASKING TAPE

Taking a piece of oversized A4 140lb Bockingford HP watercolour paper, I have taped this to an artboard with masking tape at each corner. I have then marked my visual area with a 2B pencil and softly outlined the mountain and castle shapes.

### 4 CHECK FOR THE REFLECTION

Using the No 24 watercolour brush I have thoroughly wetted the entire image area. Look closely at the reference image and you can see the light reflection in the water. I'm using a lot of it! Then, taking the No 10 watercolour brush, I added a few drops of Robert Oster Signature Graphite ink to the very top of the wetted area. You will immediately see the greens and salmon pinks leach out of the solution.

### 5 TILT YOUR BOARD

With the paper still very wet, I then added a few more drops of ink to the top section and then gently tilted the artboard from side to side to spread the ink coverage and then downwards allowing water and ink to gently flow towards the outline marks. Due to the sheer amount of water on the paper, you will notice a build-up of water at the edges of your image area. Carefully mop some of this up using the corners of some kitchen towel. Then leave the board flat for a couple of minutes. All the while you'll notice the chromatic effects become more pronounced. Then pick the board up and tilt it downwards and to the right giving the chromatic sky a little movement and direction. When happy with the direction, lay down the board flat and leave it to dry.

### 6 WAIT FOR IT TO DRY

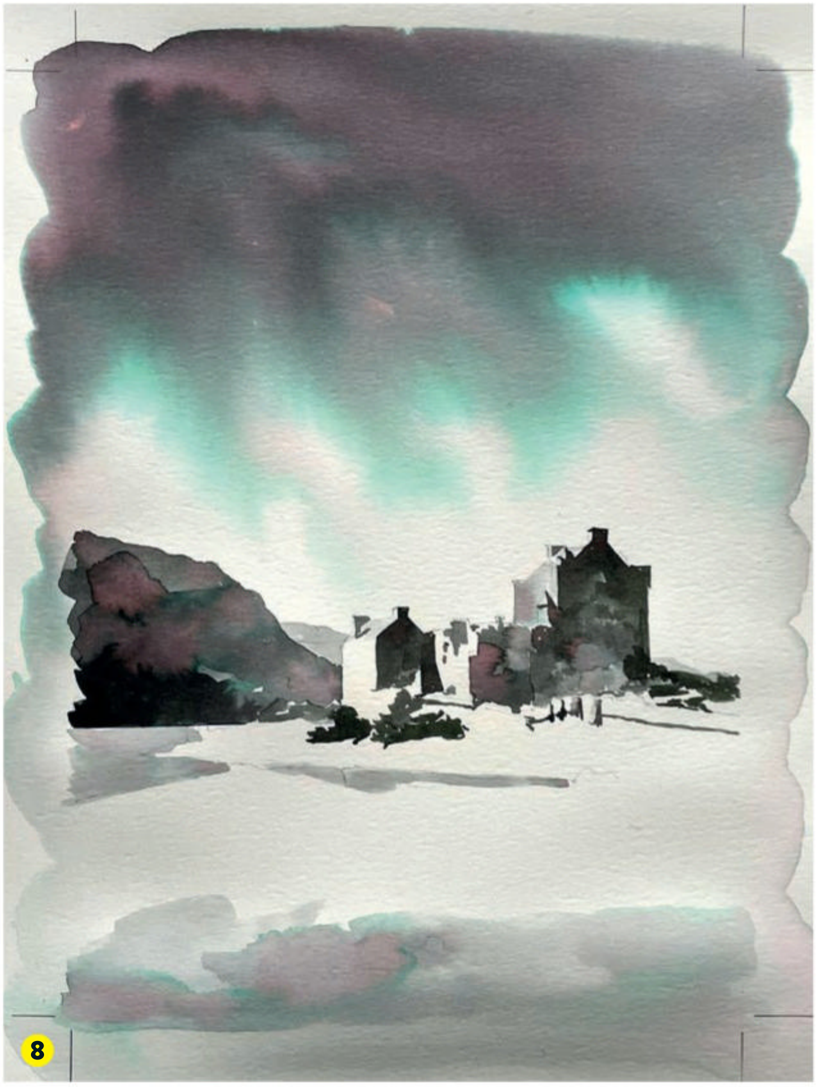
Once completely dry, you should have a gorgeous chromo sky comprised of greys, greens and salmon pinks which have dried in their own unique way. The effect looks natural, magical and non-contrived. The less input from you, the greater the visual effect. The paper should also have dried quite flat. I don't pre-stretch my papers anymore.

### 7 THE MID AND FOREGROUND AREA

Referencing your original black and white image, you have a choice of how to paint in the mid and foreground detail by using a light pad, a trace app, by eye or a combination of all. For this tutorial, I started with a light pad for the basic detail and then painted in the finer detail by eye.

## TIP

Practise this chromatic sky technique on smaller pieces of watercolour paper beforehand. It is a fast-acting process and one that looks better the less it's interfered with. The board tilting is key to the success of the chromatic sky. However, if the water builds to a point that it escapes out of the image area and dribbles off the board, don't worry. Blot the escape area and continue with the process. The ink marks can be erased away with bleach at a later time. ▶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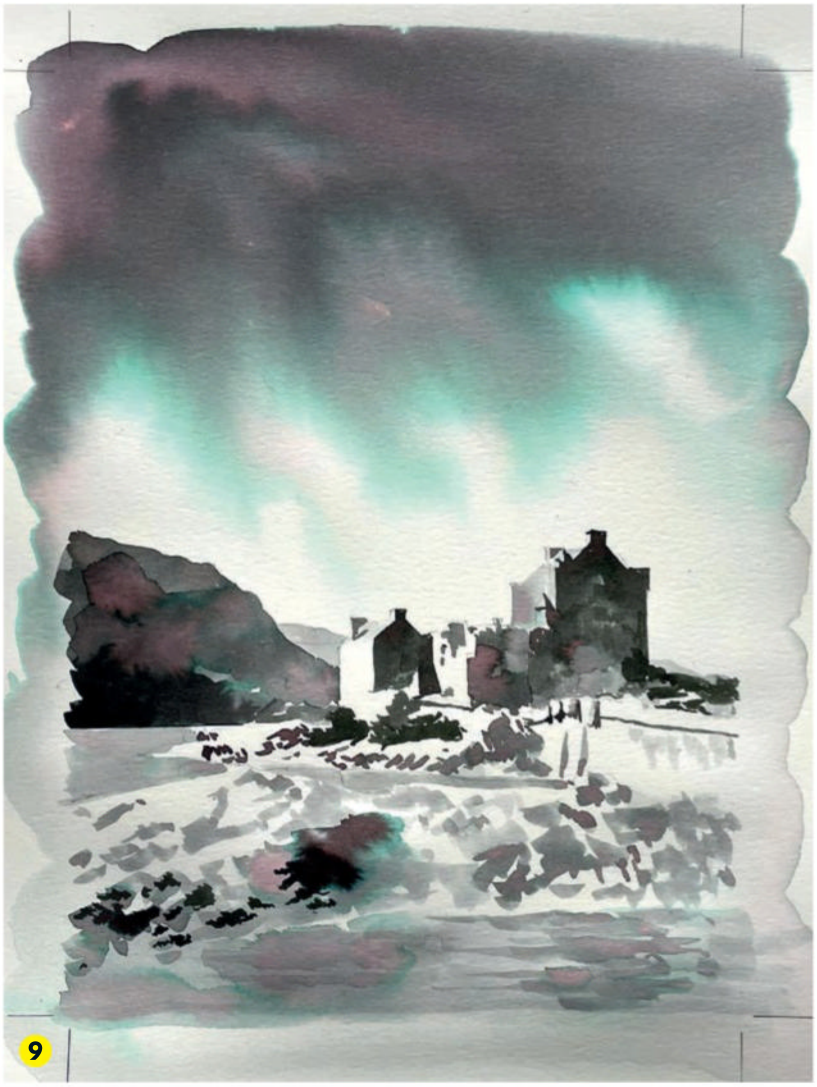
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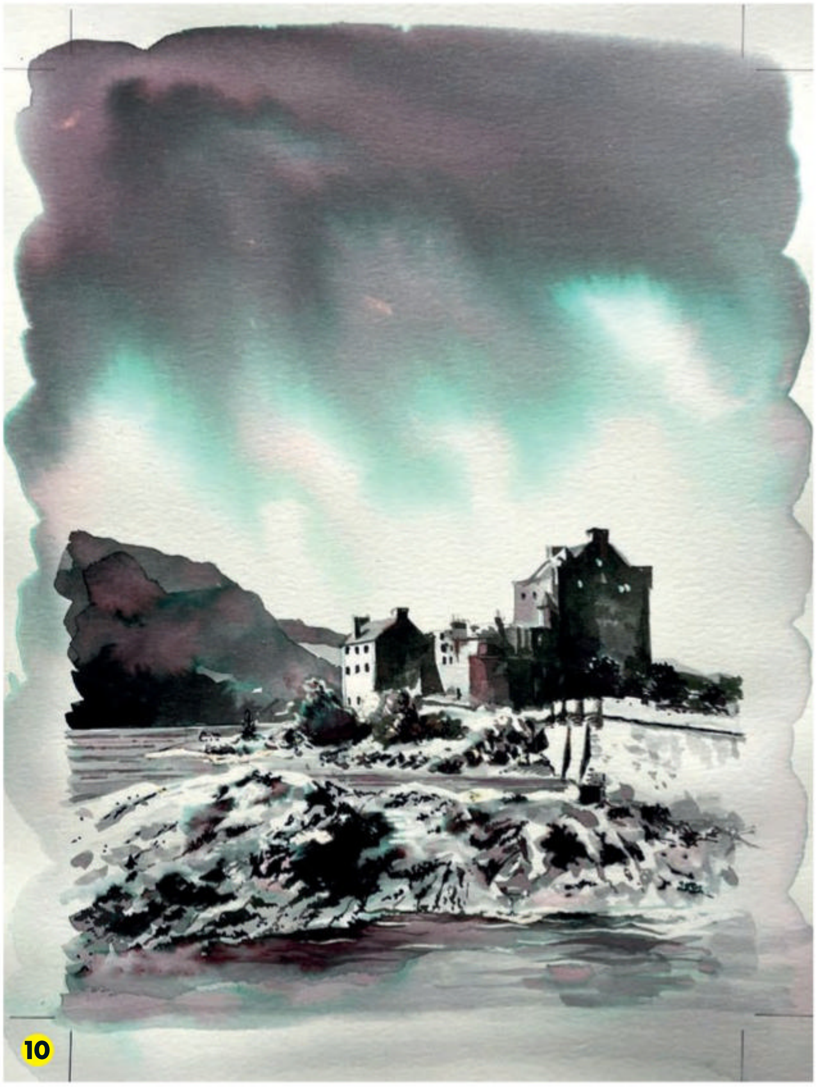

10

### 8 THE WATER AREA

With the No 6 brush, I took a drop of ink and using a mixing palette added water to it. With a weak grey solution, I painted in the mountains, sea and areas of shadow on the castle and rocks in the foreground.

### 9 DON'T LEAVE ANYTHING TO CHANCE

Test your grey on a spare piece of paper before applying; if too dark, add more water. You will also notice that the chromatic processes work here, too.

### 10 THE FINER DETAILS

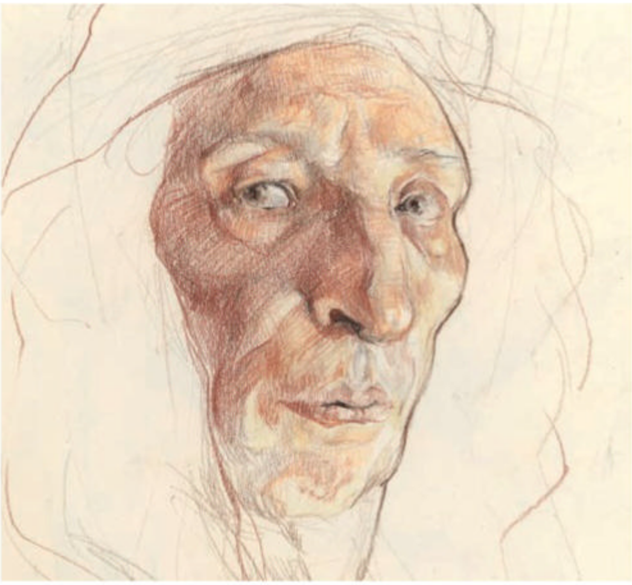
Once dry, I made a much darker grey solution and painted in the darker areas of shadow. When this had dried, I used my fountain pen to ink in the really dark areas of the rocks in the foreground. Because I'm using a nib, the ink dries darker on the paper. Finally, using my half-rigger brush again and dipping it gently into a small pot of bleach and water, I paint in a couple of highlights onto the castle, the rocks and the water. I also erased some areas of shadow that I no longer want. And there you have it. A visually dramatic image created with just one fountain pen ink.

---

*If you'd like to explore fountain pen ink art further, Nick also has an online course available with Udemy which has a 20% discount if accessed from his website: nickstewart.ink/online-course* □

# ONLINE DRAWING CLASSES

**If you're looking for an online drawing community of affordable & flexible classes, we're here for you!** Join the Draw Brighton Patreon from £3.60-£30 per month for tiered access to online drawing sessions, tutorials & artist's reference photos. Sign up before July 31st for a 25% discount using the code ARTIST25 and cancel any time. Membership includes:



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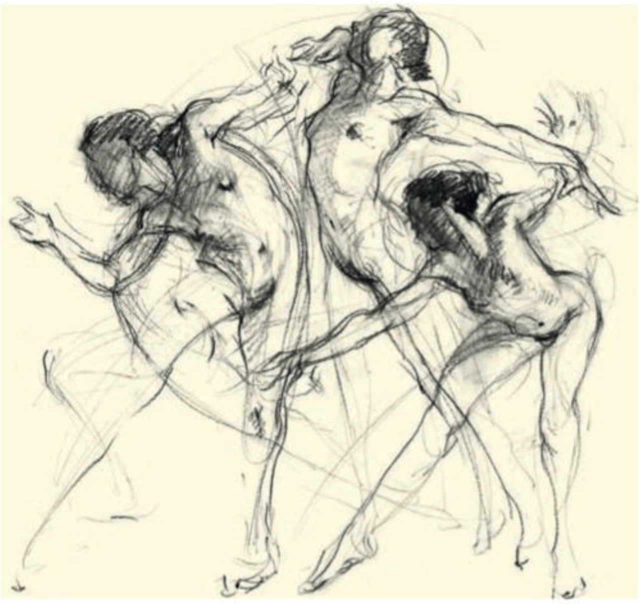

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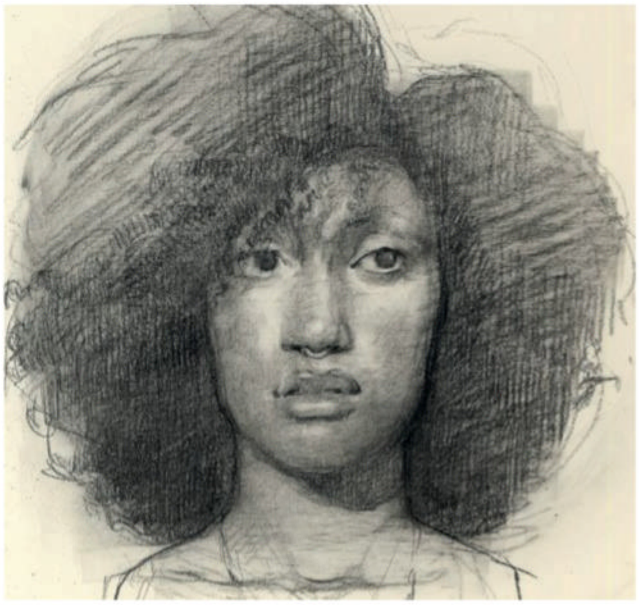

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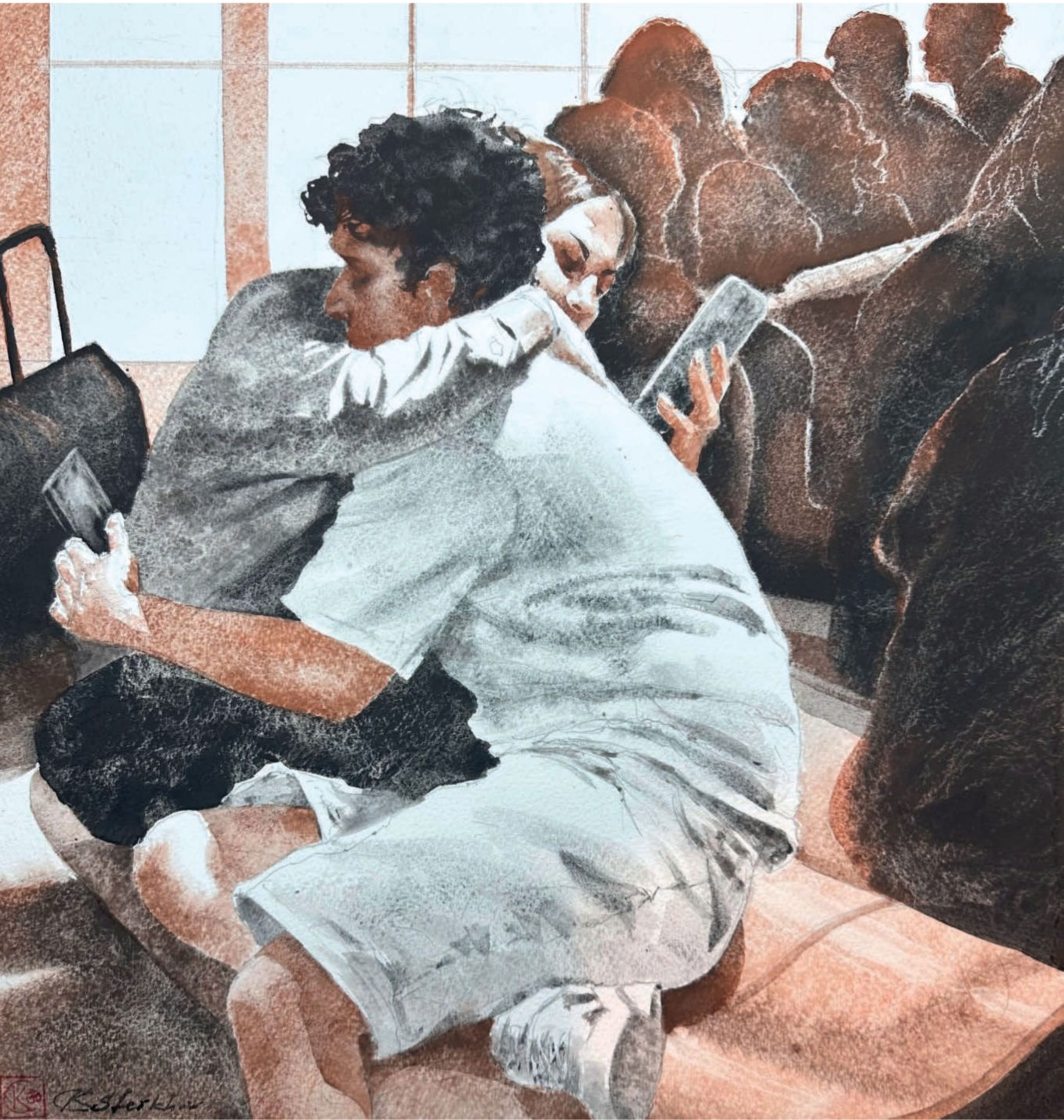
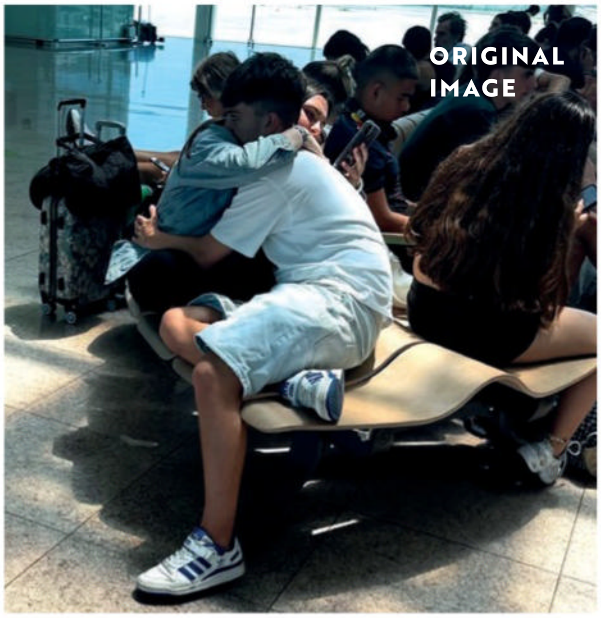
# Togetherness



For this practical story, **KONSTANTIN STERKHOV** has deliberately chosen only two watercolour paints that emulate graphic mediums like graphite, chalk, coal and sanguine. Here, he shows you his process

THIS PAINTING HAS A MORE GRAPHIC FEEL compared to my usual style of watercolour paintings. The reference was taken at Barcelona Airport, but I decided to simplify it by dropping a few figures and details. The characters are rendered realistically, while the surroundings resemble theatrical decorations, at times transforming into symbols that convey either my own emotions or those of the characters. The reference also required cropping and minor adjustments. Afterward, I created an outline drawing in a chosen square format and added subtle highlights with a wax crayon to the background figures. To achieve a more graphic appearance, I decided to use only two colours: Sedona Genuine and Hematite Genuine, both granulating PrimaTek paints by Daniel Smith.
***konstantinsterkhov.com***



## KONSTANTIN'S MATERIALS

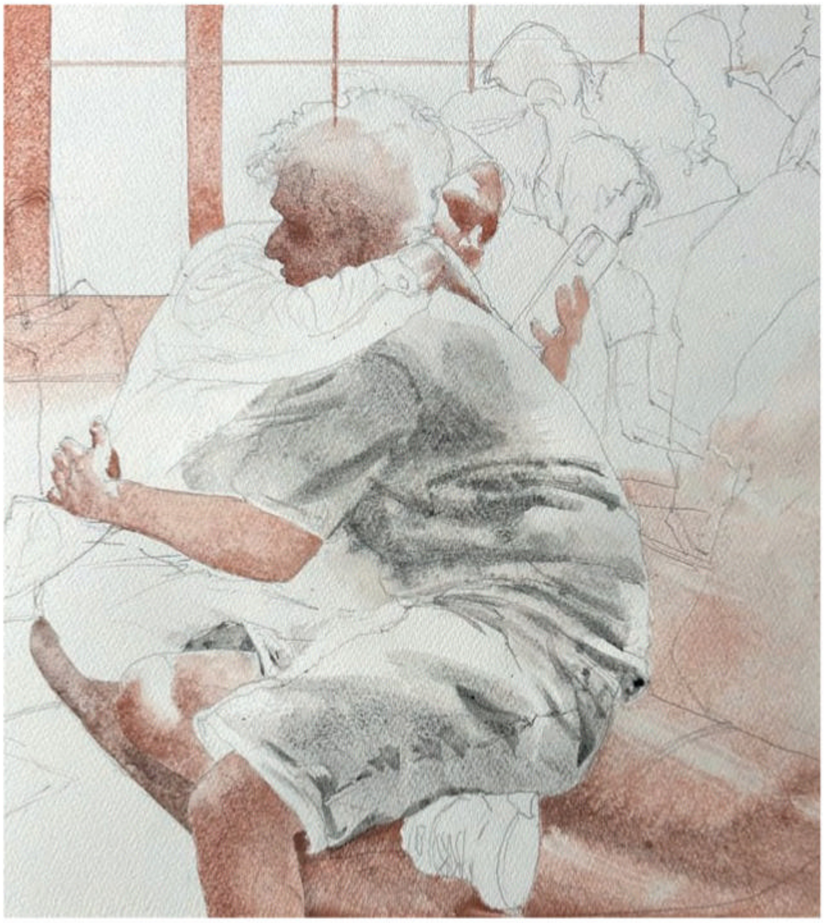
**Paint**
A limited palette of Daniel Smith Watercolours: Sedona Genuine, Hematite Genuine

**Brushes**
Roubloff Kolinsky mix #10, Roubloff White Aqua synthetic #7

**Paper**
Saunders Waterford, 100% cotton, white, Cold Pressed, 300 g, 38x38 cm

**Support**
5 mm plastic board 40x40 cm

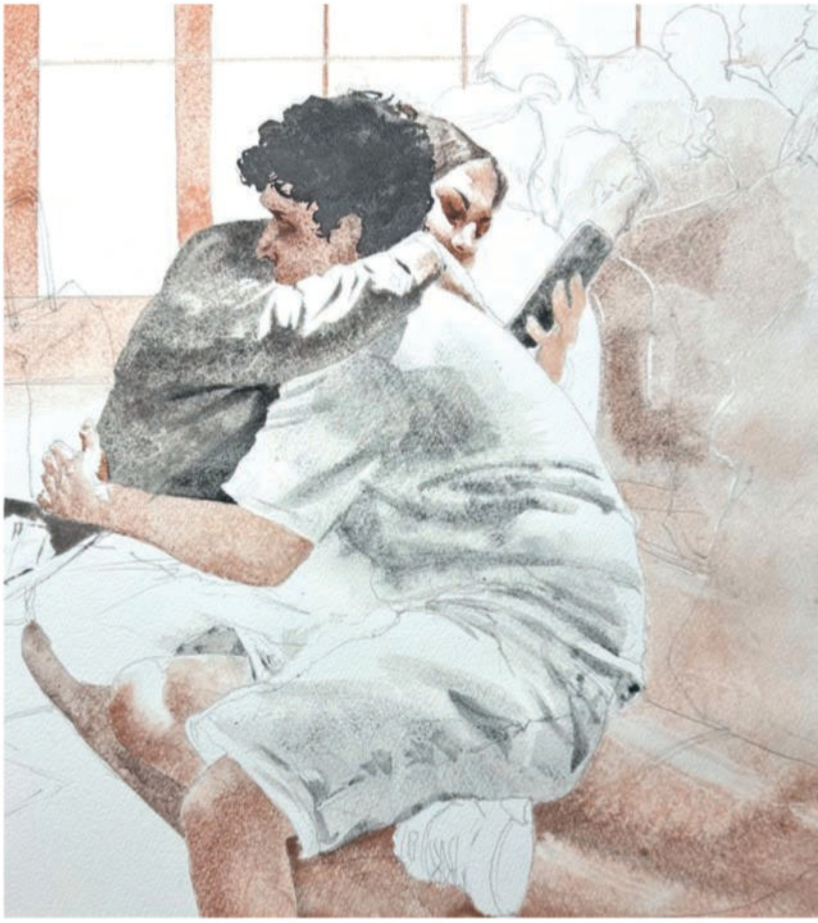
**Additional**
Wax crayon by Caran d'Ache



1

### FIRST WASH

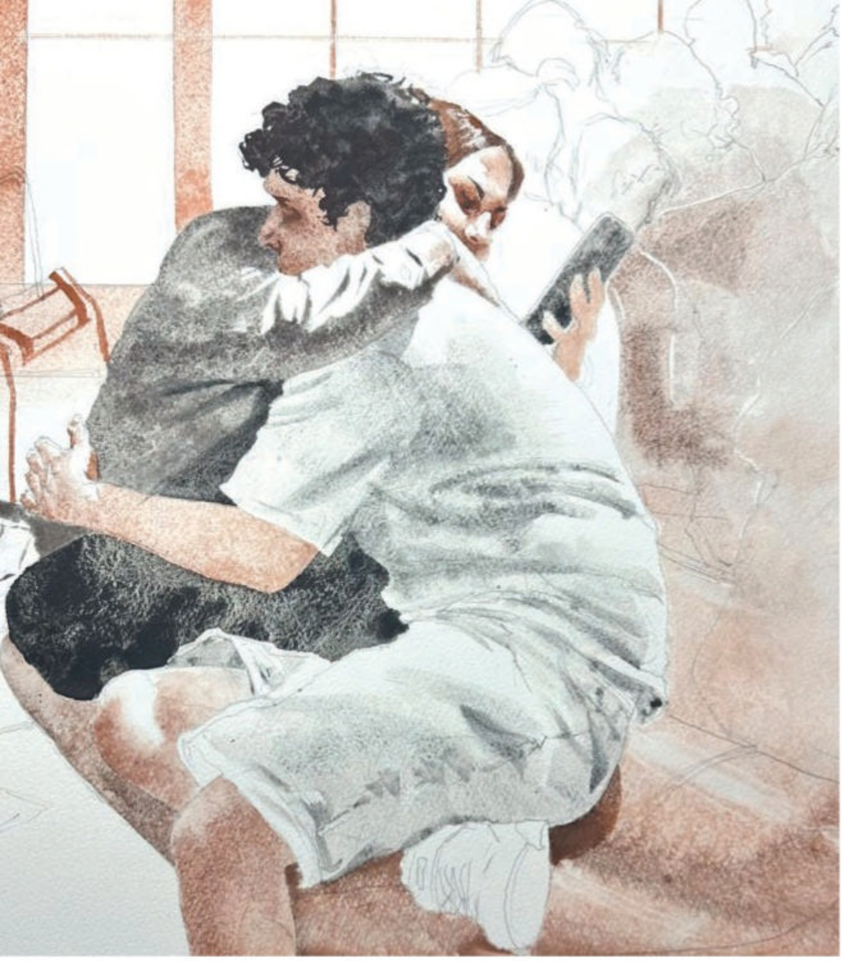
Apply the initial wash for the figures, covering the skin areas and modelling the folds of the boy's white clothing in shadow. At the same time, project the tones of the bench and the wall.

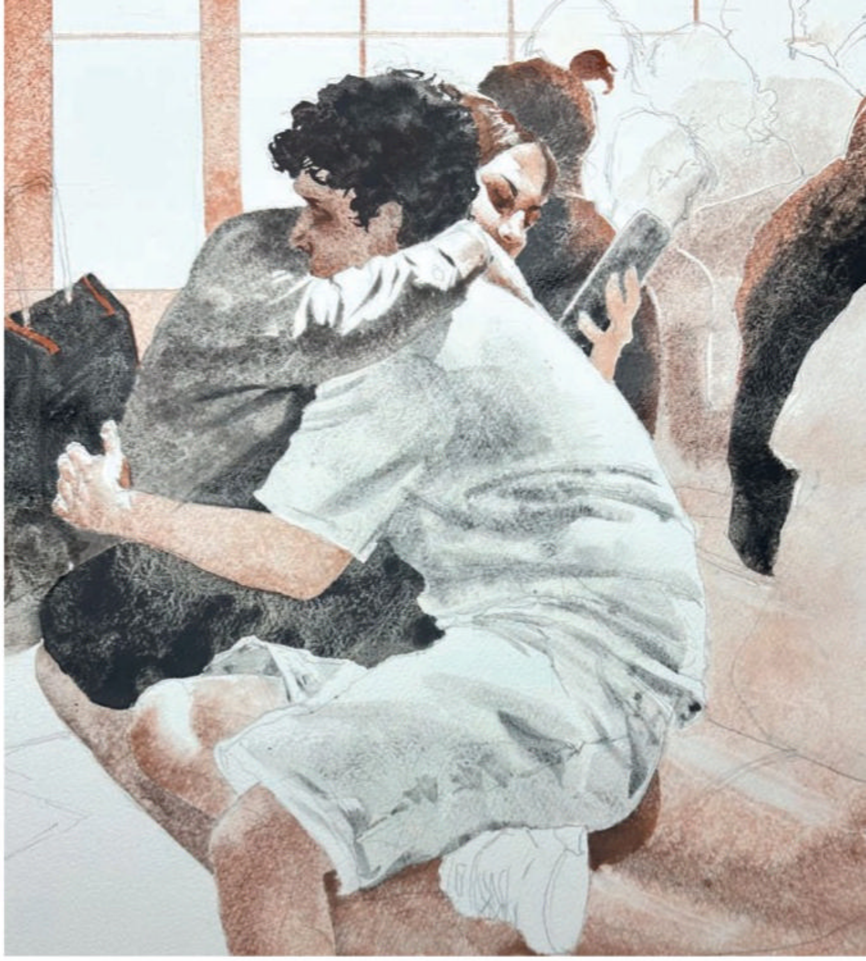


2

### DEFINING FEATURES

Refine the facial features and add the darker tone to the girl's jacket and her phone. Softly blend the wash into the background. ▶



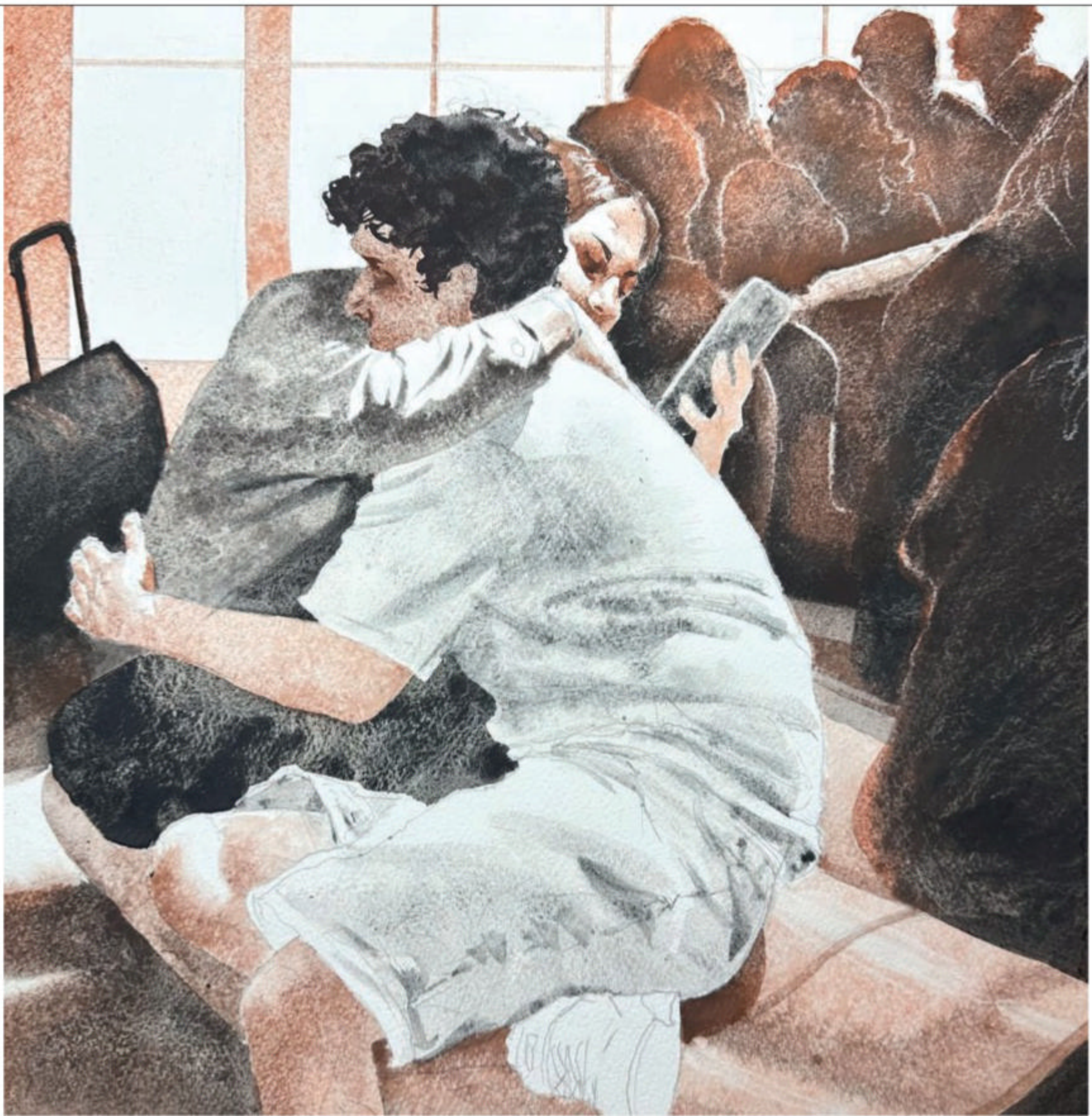


### 3 ADDING DEPTH

Introduce the first darker tones to the girl's trousers, adding a cast shadow on the bench, and defining the outlines of the baggage.

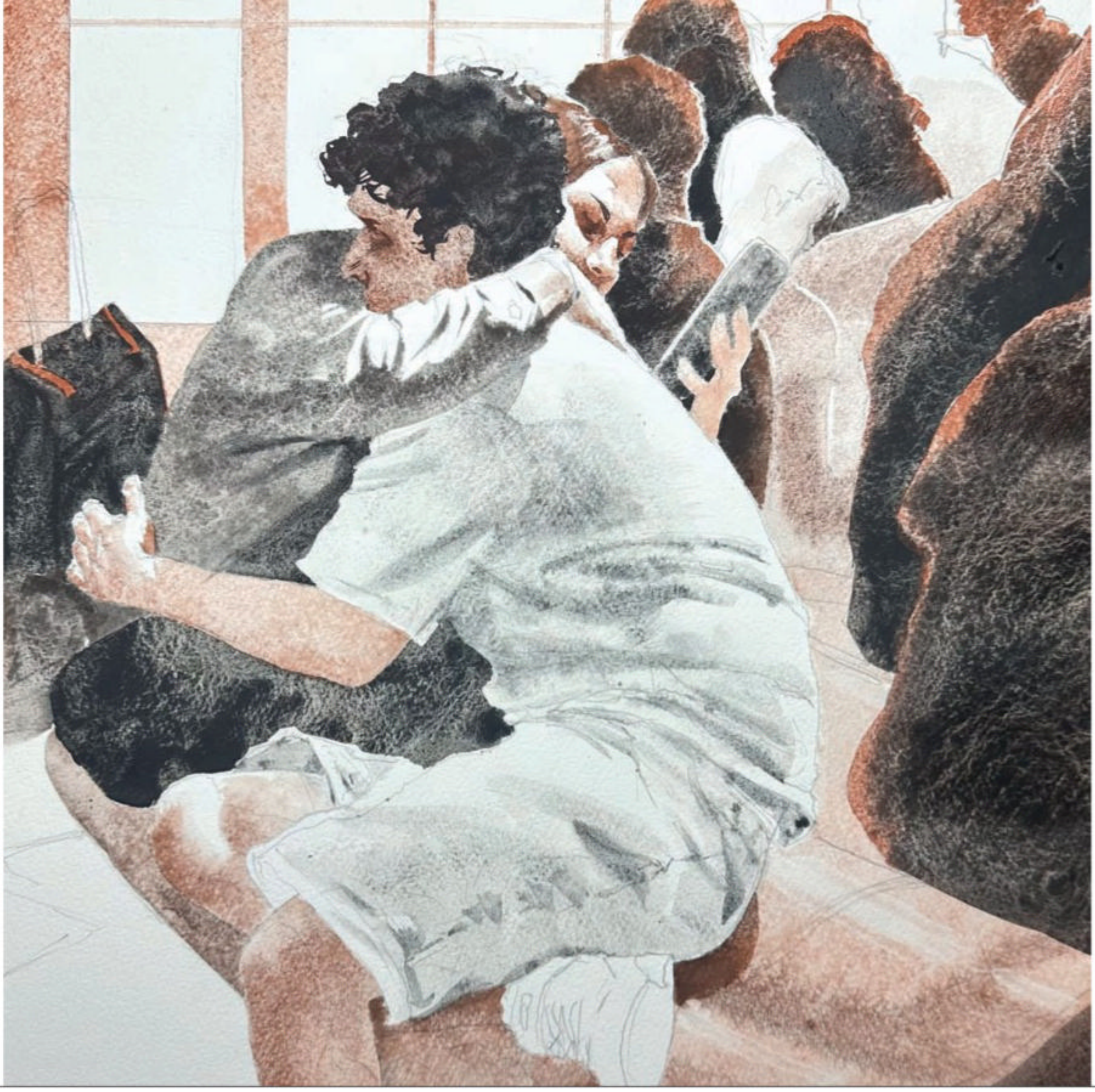
### 4 SILHOUETTES AND CONTRAST

A couple of darker silhouettes begin to emerge. The baggage creates another dark shape to enhance the contrast against the boy's lighter hand.

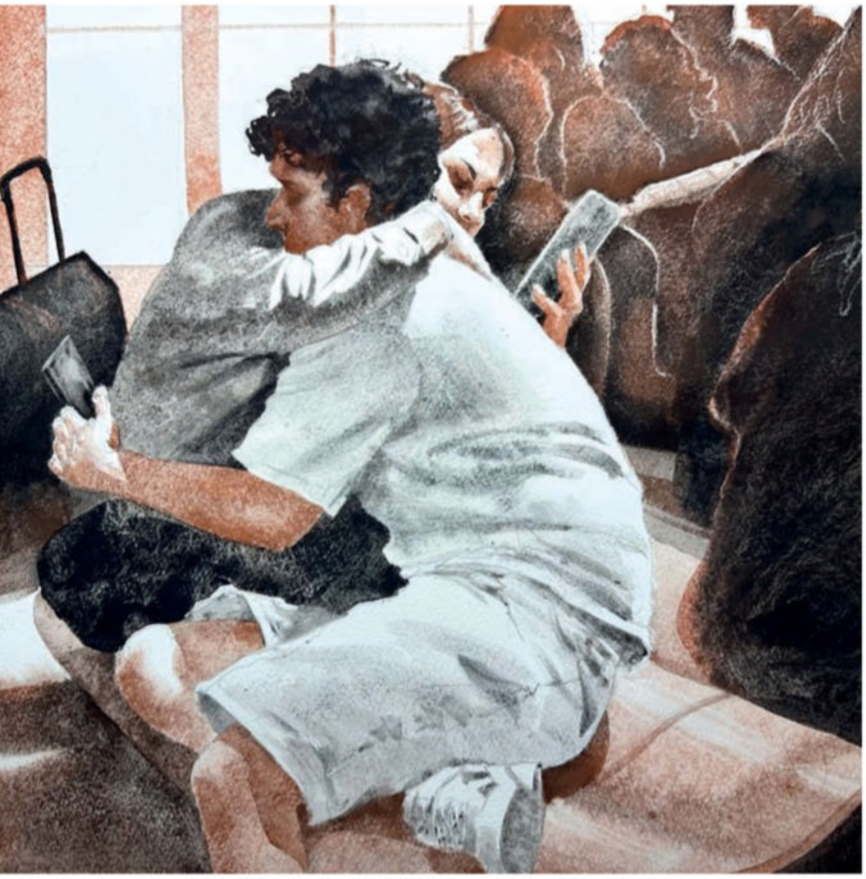


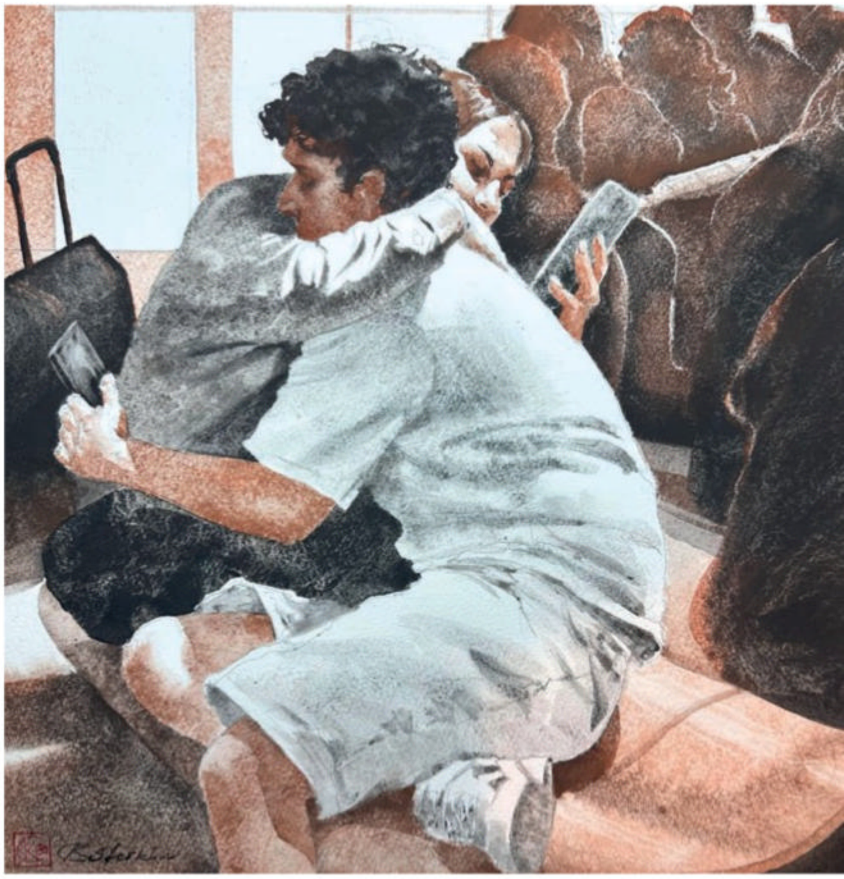
### 6 BACKGROUND WASH

Enhance the background by adding cast shadows on the floor to the left and applying a wash over all the background figures. I made a correction here and decided to unify all background figures in the same reddish mid-tone.



**5** **BACKGROUND FIGURES**
Add more figures in the background, specifically intended to remain as dark, undefined silhouettes.





**7** **FRONT FIGURE**
Refine shadows on the front figure, adding a smart phone to the boy's hand, and further defining the girl's hand and face.

**8** **FINAL CHECK**
Review the entire painting for consistency and complete it with a signature. ☐

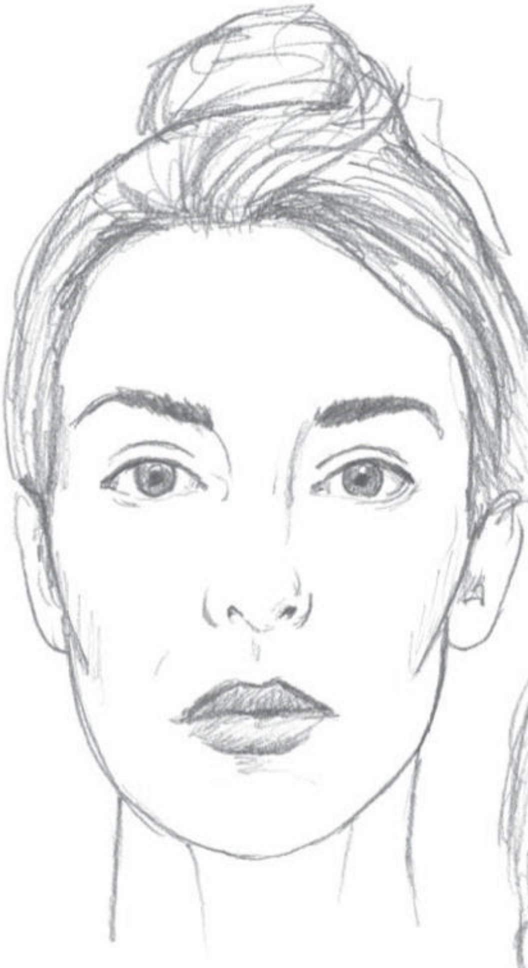
# Express yourself!

In an exclusive extract from her new book, *Drawing People*, Catherine V Holmes shows you how to capture common, everyday expressions – in just 15 minutes

One of the many challenging aspects of drawing human faces is that it's not really just one expression you need to grasp, but many. And one of the best ways to learn how to draw expressions is to make faces in the mirror and observe what happens to different features and muscles. You can even take a selfie to study, or a short video and then review it frame by frame to see the subtle changes.

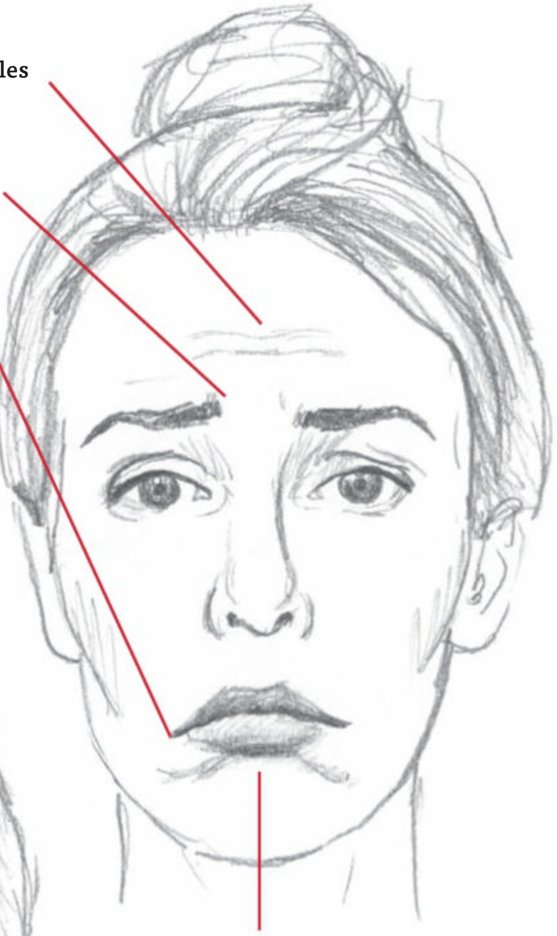
Here are a set of portraits I drew that capture different emotions, and the main takeaways from each that may be helpful when trying to capture emotions through drawing.

## Neutral expression



**There are no discernible facial muscle contractions and the face is relaxed. Use this expression to compare the actions and movements of other expressions.**

## Sad expression



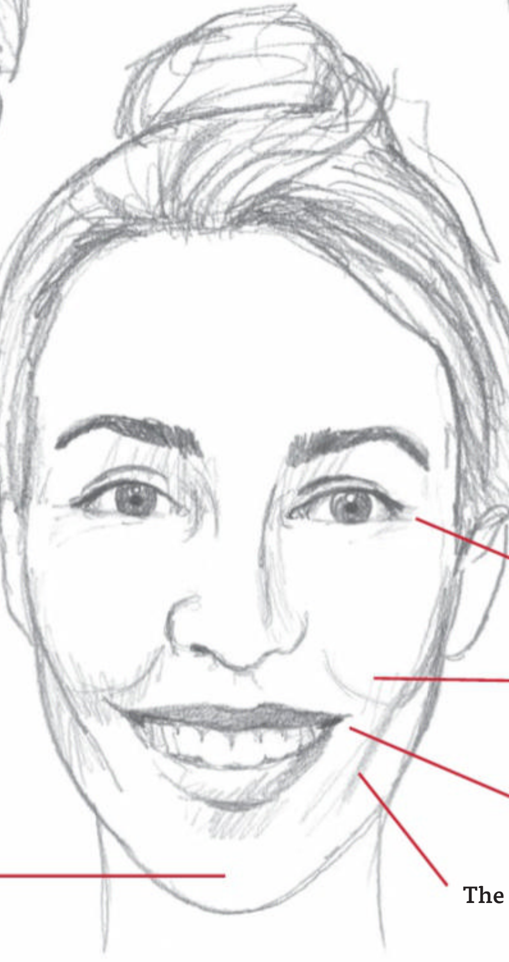
**The forehead wrinkles**

**The eyelids and eyebrows raise and the eyebrows draw together**

**The corners of the mouth turn downward**

**The lower lip protrudes and causes shadows below it**

## Happy expression



**The eyes narrow**

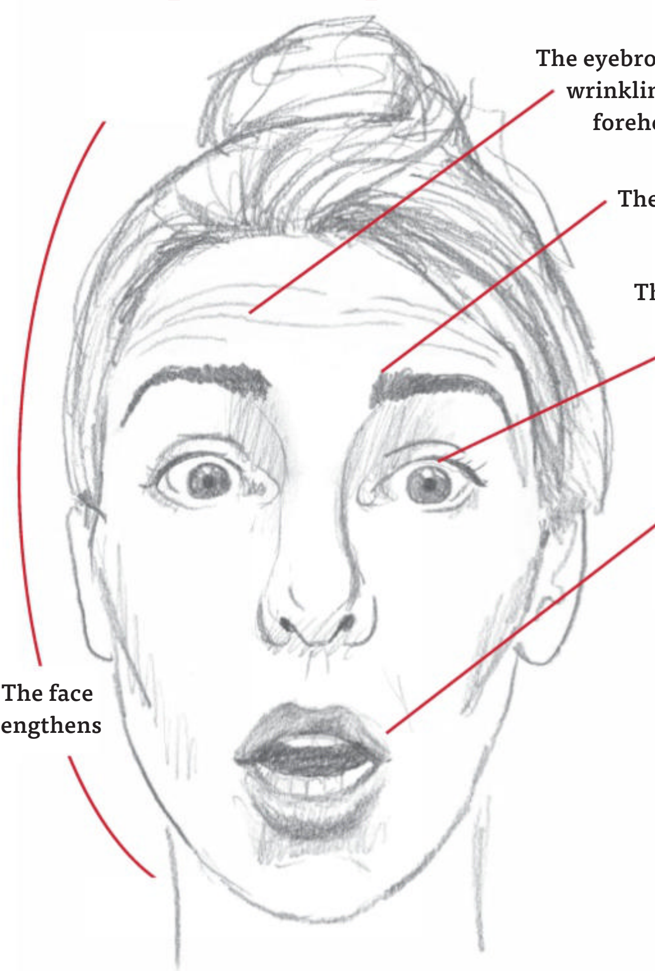
**The apples of the cheeks become fuller and higher**

**The corners of the mouth lift up**

**The lines at the sides of the mouth deepen**

**The chin is brought down and is more pronounced**

## Surprised expression



The eyebrows arch, wrinkling the forehead

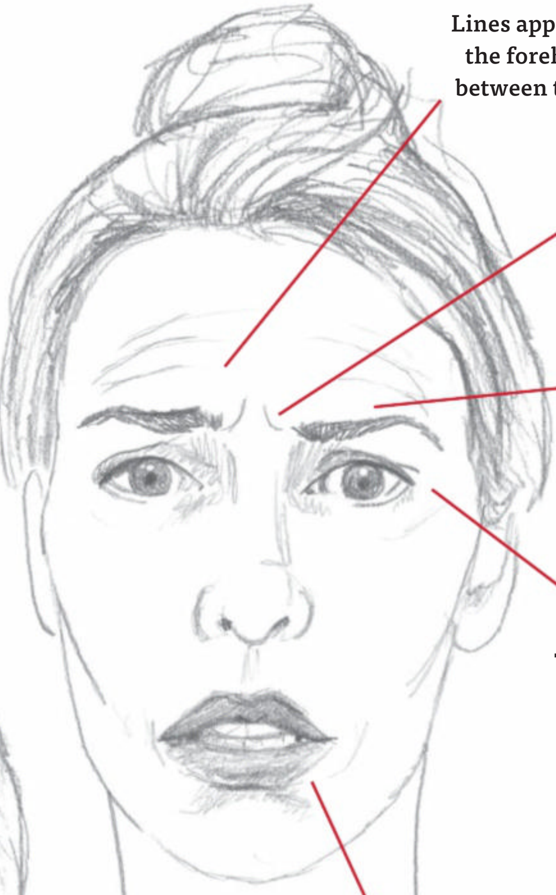
The upper eyelids curve upward

The eyes widen so that the whites are visible above the iris

The jaw drops, opening the mouth and relaxing the lips

The face lengthens

## Afraid expression



Lines appear across the forehead and between the brows

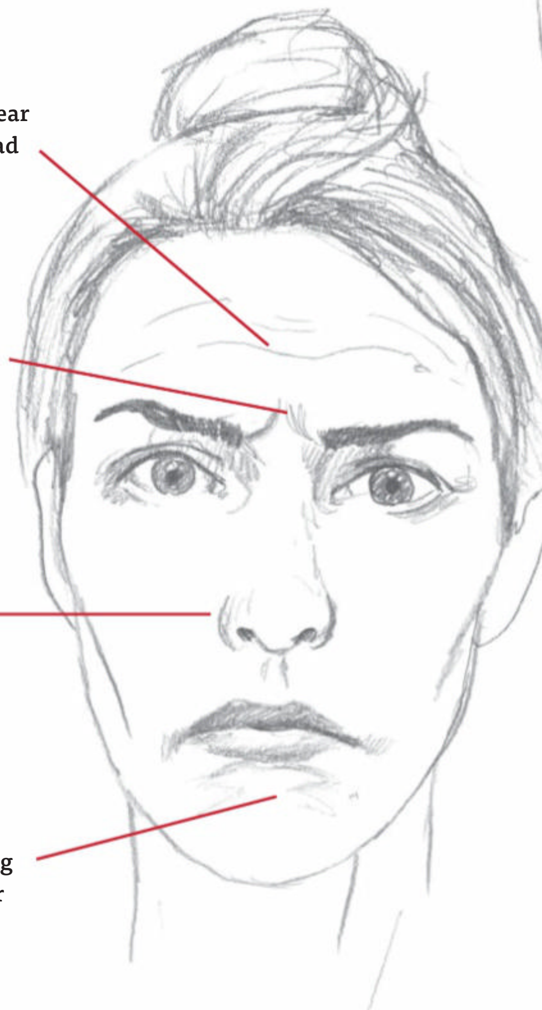
The lids rise toward the center of the face

The eyebrows draw together

The eyes turn down at the corners

The lips part slightly, and the lower lip protrudes

## Angry expression



Deep lines appear on the forehead

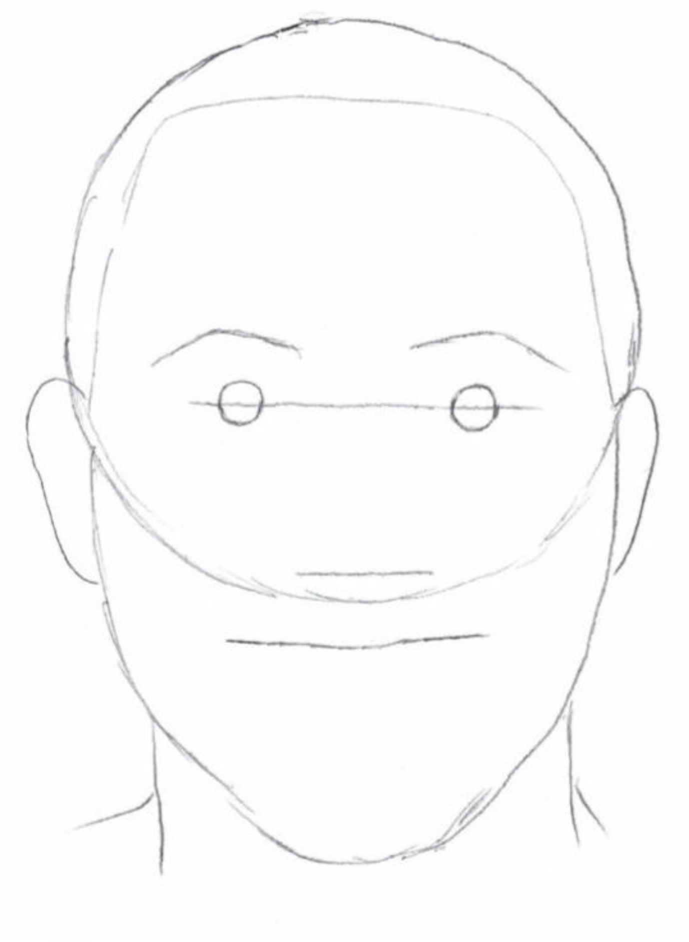
The eyebrows are pulled down and drawn together

The nostrils flare

The mouth tightens, making the lips thinner

# Smiling

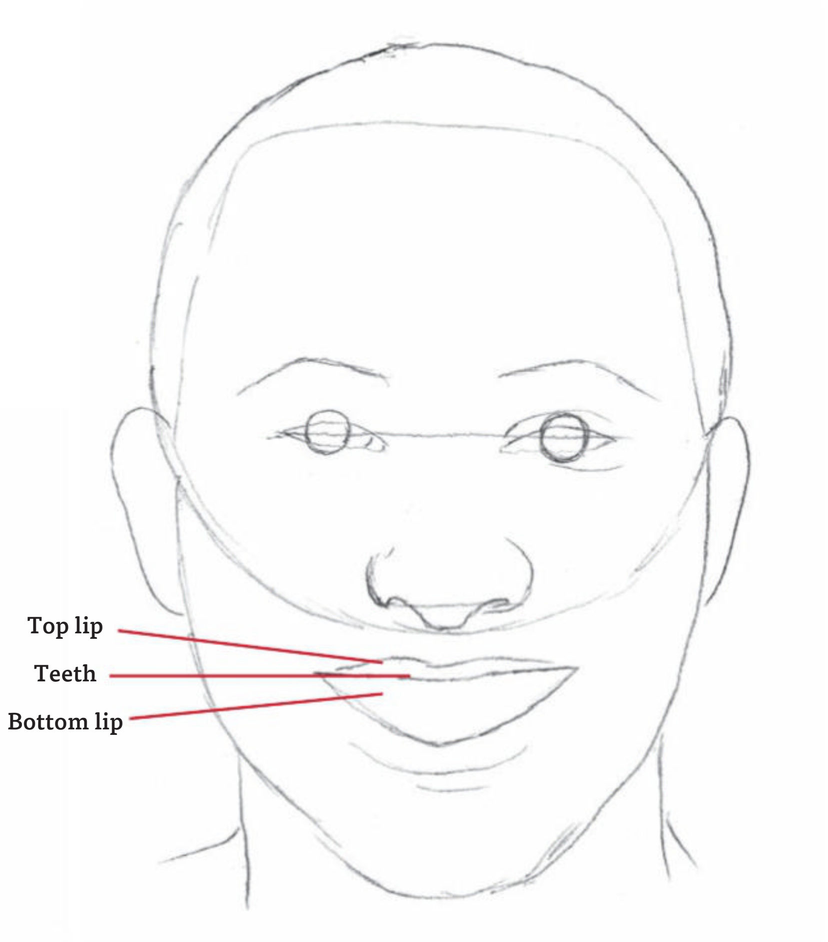
"Say cheese!" You'll likely have plenty of smiling faces to choose from when it comes to portraits, so make sure you've really practised drawing a mouth and teeth.



1

### DRAW THE BASICS

Draw the outlines of the head. Include all necessary guidelines for the eyes, mouth and nose. The guidelines for the nose and mouth should be slightly higher than usual to accommodate a big smile. Draw the hairline, the ears, and the neck and shoulders.



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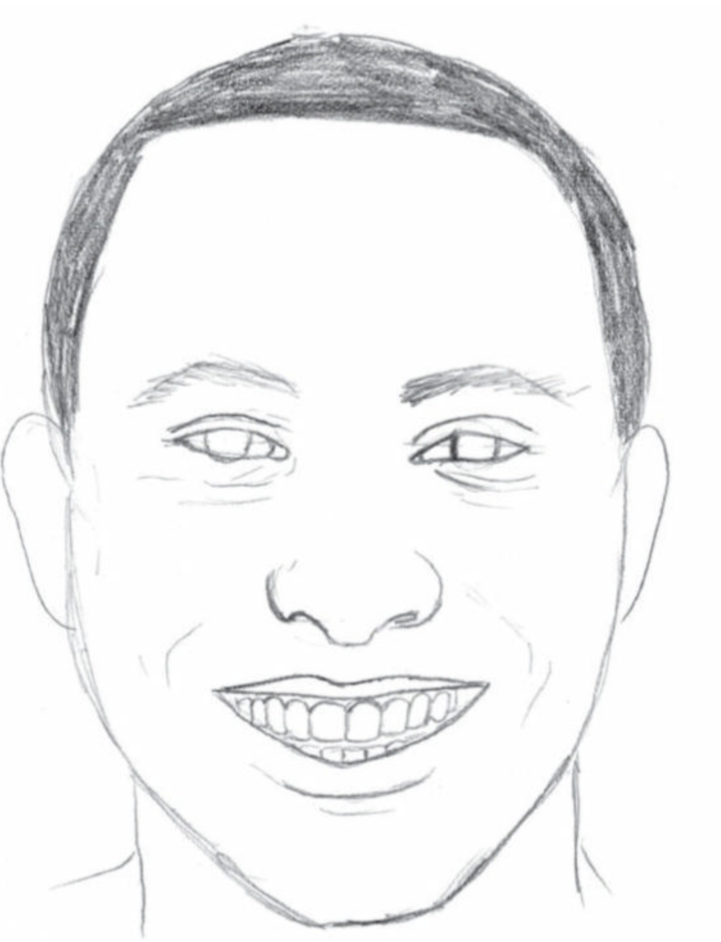
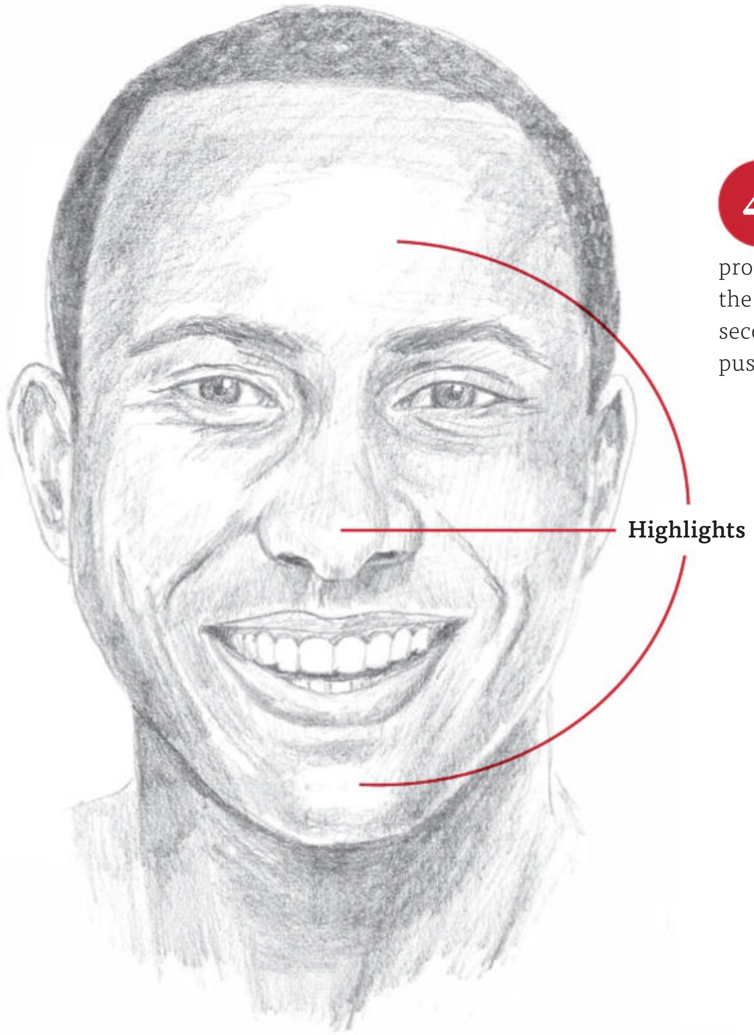
Now, draw in the basic features. Because the eyes are squinting, the shape of the eye will overlap the circles for the irises. Draw the mouth. Smiling stretches the lip, so the top lip is thinner than usual.



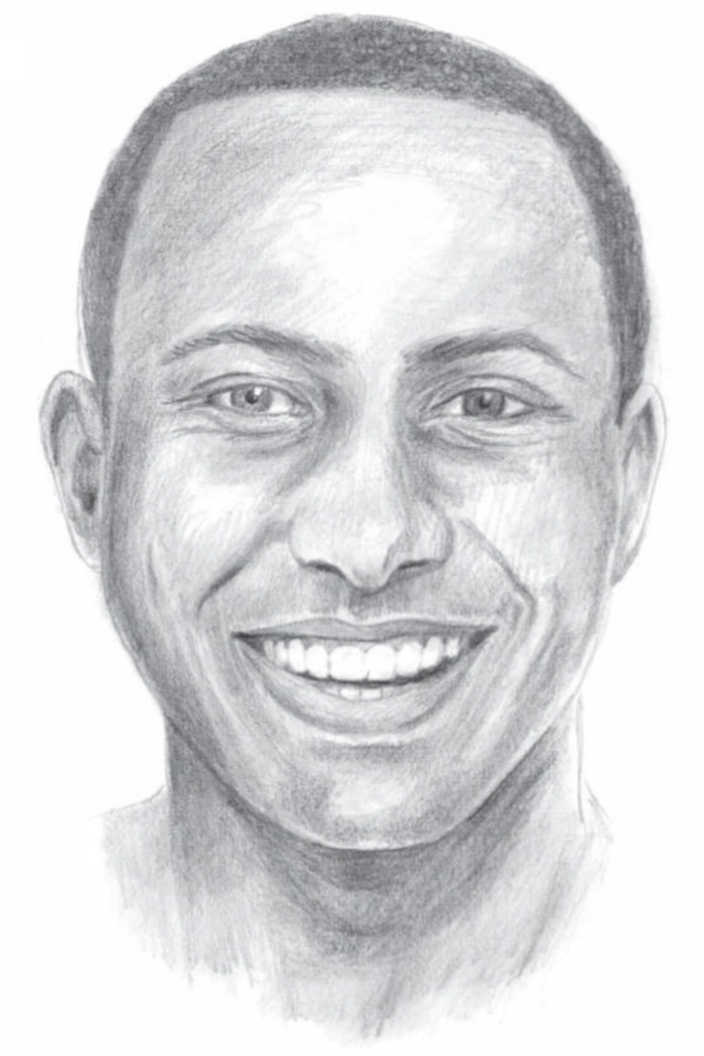
3

### REFINE THE FEATURES

Rub out any guidelines that are no longer needed, including parts of the iris. Begin to refine the features. Draw a few lines to indicate wrinkles from the way the face moves with a smile. Most definition will be done with light shading later. Add creases at the bottoms of the eyes from the smile pushing the cheeks up.

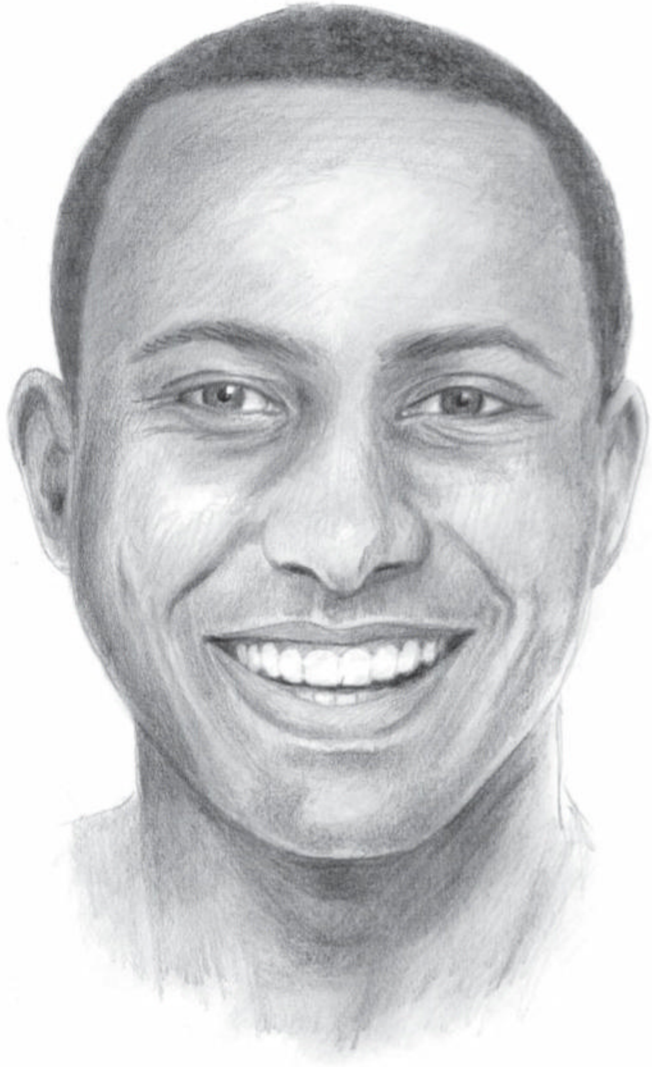


**4** Add a layer of tone and more details to the features. Pay attention to highlighted areas and leave them light. Make the laugh lines more pronounced, and add some lines to show the creases along the side of the mouth toward the sides of the nose. Add a secondary line under the lower eyelid formed by the cheeks pushing upward. Add the ear detail.



**5** **BLEND & BUILD CONTRAST**

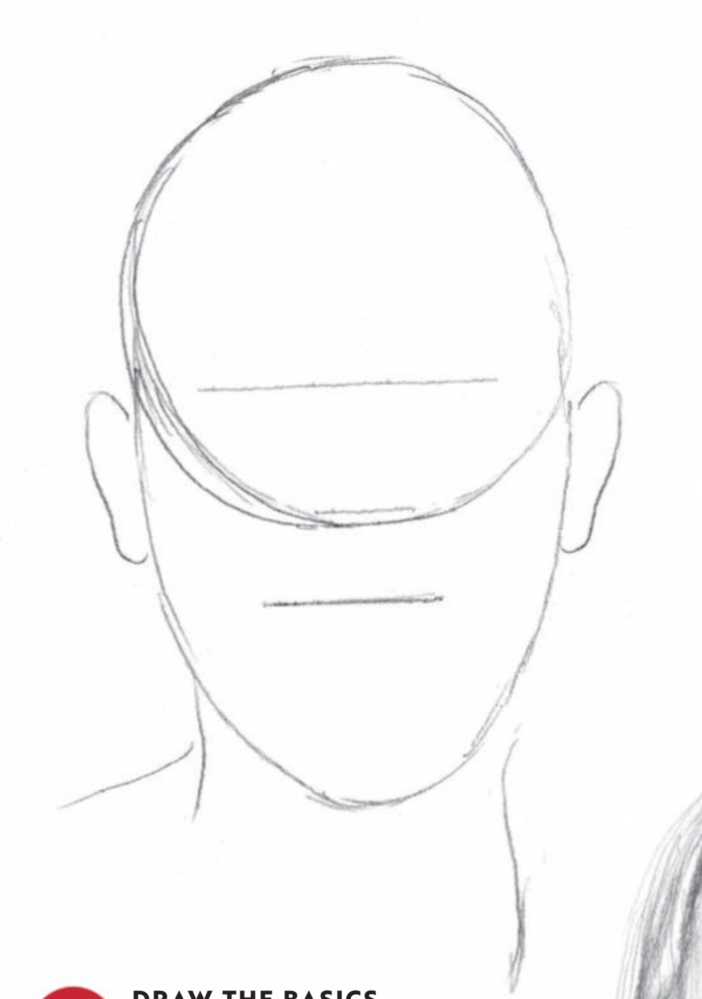
Blend, then continue to add more contrast. The smile stretches the lips, reducing the amount of shadow that's showing underneath the upper lip. The eyes, inside of the mouth, inner ears, nostrils and hair should be among the darkest tones.



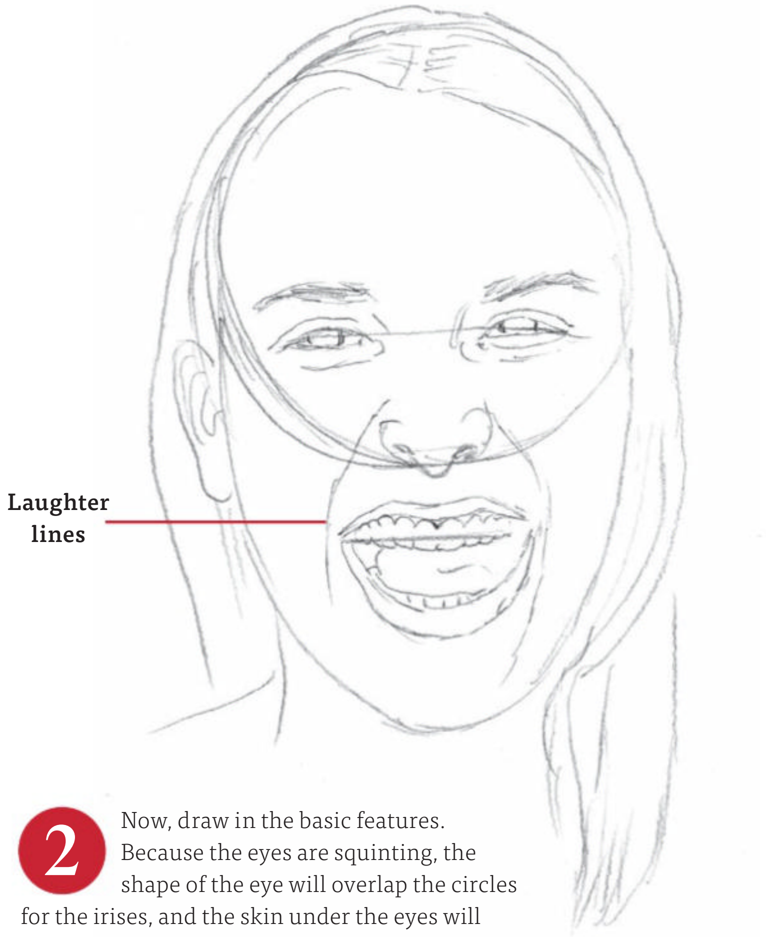
**6** Refine the artwork by adding more contrast between highlights and shadows. Use a kneaded eraser to clean up and highlight areas as needed. ▶

# Laughing

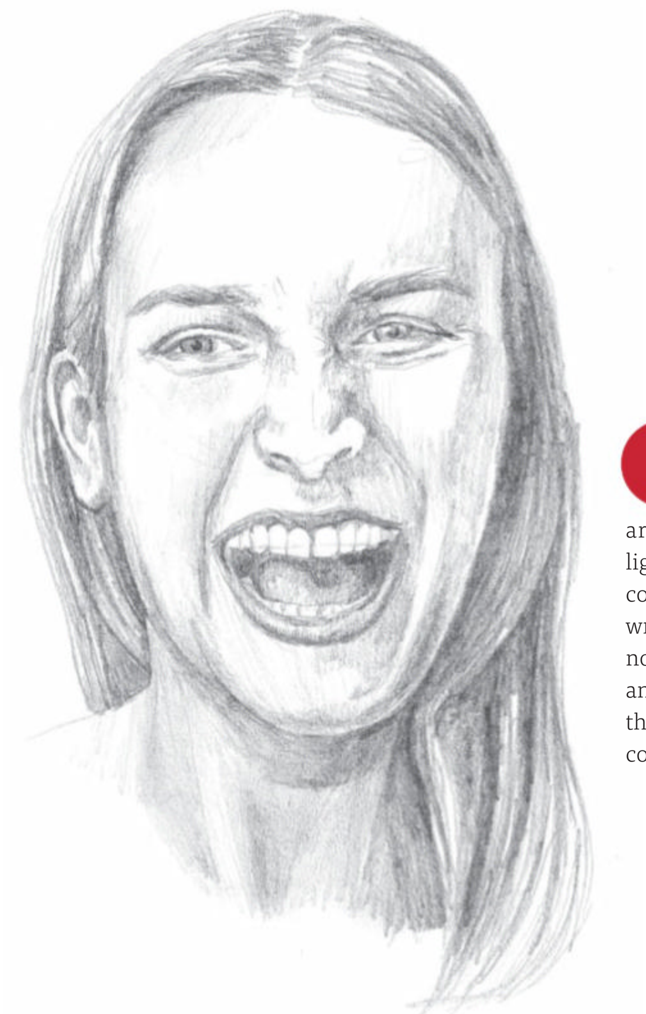
Drawing someone who is laughing will take your mouth-drawing skills to the next level. Pay attention to the different shadows and dark areas inside the mouth – it's not just black – which makes it feel realistic.



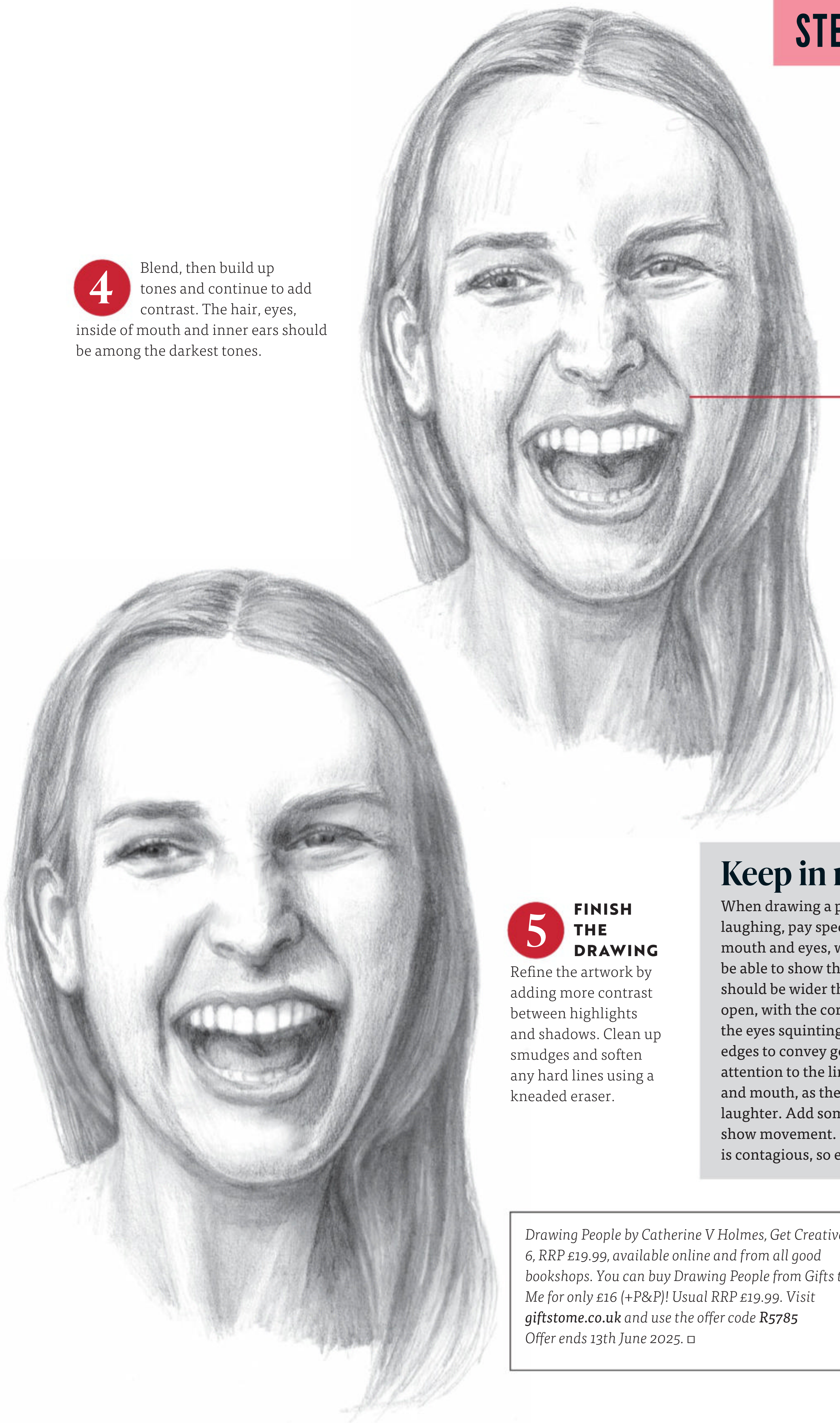
1 **DRAW THE BASICS**
Firstly, draw the outline of the head. Include all necessary guidelines for the eyes, mouth and nose. Draw the ears and the neck and shoulders.



2 Now, draw in the basic features. Because the eyes are squinting, the shape of the eye will overlap the circles for the irises, and the skin under the eyes will bunch. The eyebrows are slightly raised. Draw a nose with flared nostrils, and an open mouth with its corners tilting upward. Draw the teeth and outline the tongue. Sketch curved lines around the mouth and begin to refine the ears, eyebrows and hair.



3 **ADD TONE**
Rub out any guidelines that are no longer needed. Add a light layer of tone, concentrating on the subtle wrinkle lines at the top of nose, around the mouth, and under the eyes. Thicken the eyebrows and add contrast to the hair.



**4** Blend, then build up tones and continue to add contrast. The hair, eyes, inside of mouth and inner ears should be among the darkest tones.

**Notice how dark the laughter lines have become**

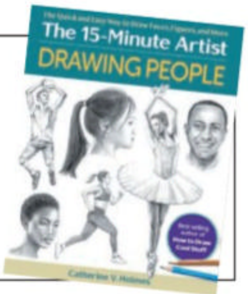
**5** **FINISH THE DRAWING**

Refine the artwork by adding more contrast between highlights and shadows. Clean up smudges and soften any hard lines using a kneaded eraser.

## Keep in mind

When drawing a portrait of someone laughing, pay special attention to the mouth and eyes, which are where you'll be able to show their joy. The mouth should be wider than usual and slightly open, with the corners turned up. Draw the eyes squinting or crinkled at the edges to convey genuine happiness. Pay attention to the lines around the eyes and mouth, as they deepen during laughter. Add some lines or wrinkles to show movement. Remember, laughter is contagious, so enjoy the process!

*Drawing People by Catherine V Holmes, Get Creative 6, RRP £19.99, available online and from all good bookshops. You can buy Drawing People from Gifts to Me for only £16 (+P&P)! Usual RRP £19.99. Visit* **giftstome.co.uk** *and use the offer code* **R5785** *Offer ends 13th June 2025.* ◻



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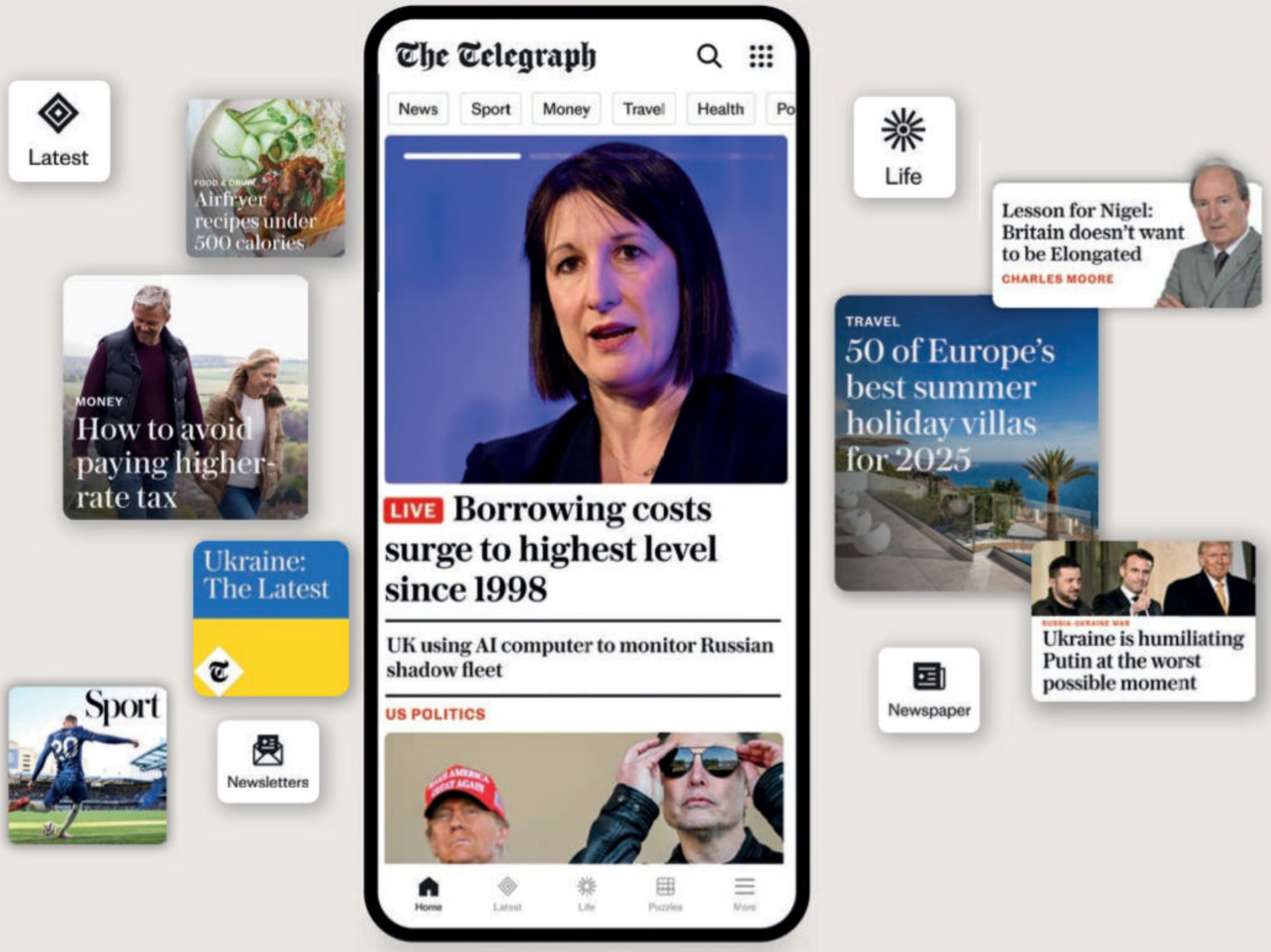
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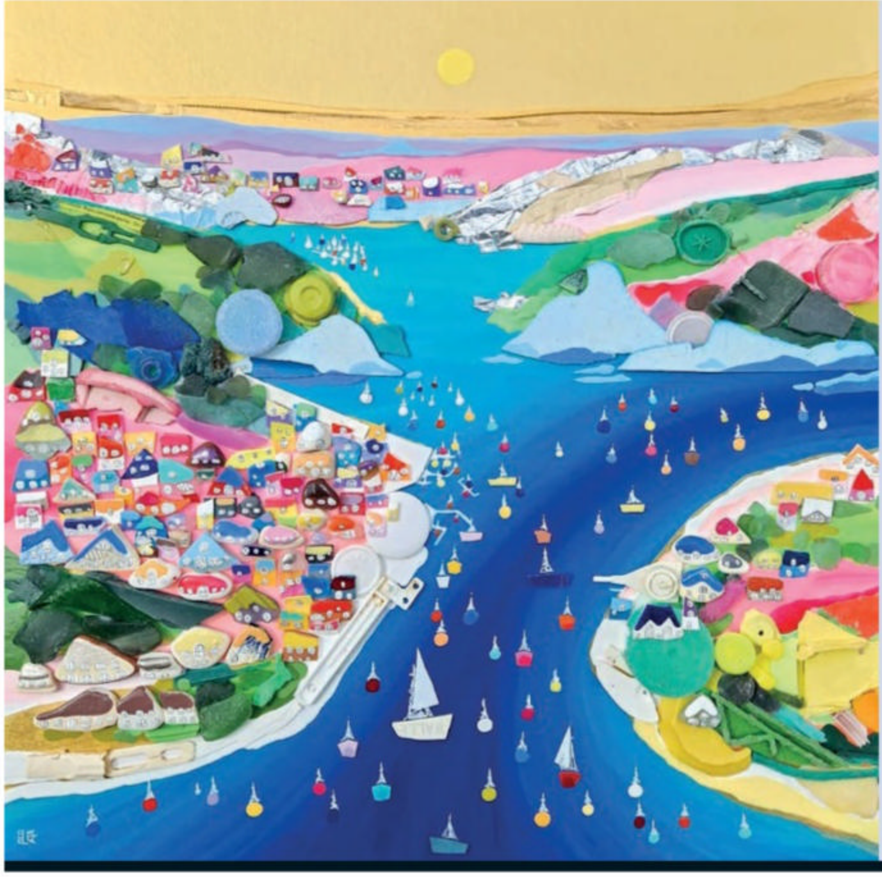


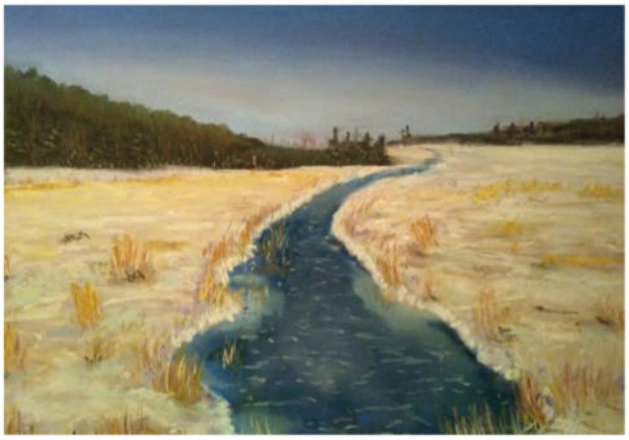
## MESSAGE OF THE MONTH

### Laura Edmunds

I'm a beach clean artist from Plymouth. I use the rubbish I find on local beaches to create local landscapes. I use as much colour as possible and as well as making people smile with colour, I try to spread the word about the state of our oceans and our relationship with them. I'm a member of the Plymouth Colour Collective alongside Brian Pollard, Arth Lawr, Henry Sells and Lou C Fused Glass.

### Marcele Silvina

I am a neurodivergent artist (I am autistic and also have ADHD). Art has been my passion for years and it also helps me to work with my emotions. For me, art means freedom; it feels like entering a place where there is no right or wrong. I find it very refreshing. I discovered *Artists & Illustrators* at the beginning of 2024, and it is impressive to see the richness of advice and information in the magazine. It is also wonderful to read about various artists and discover different styles and techniques.



### Fadi Abu-Deeb

I feel much delight every time I open an issue of *Artists & Illustrators*. Reading about art gives me the freedom to imagine in abstraction, away from the strictness of my work in academia. I no longer read just to study, but to attain an artistic mindset – just to be in the presence of other international artists and roam freely among their works. It's the freedom of shaping colours that made me experiment with soft pastels, where my fingers are in direct contact with the pigments. For this painting, I chose a snowy landscape in Dalarna County, Sweden, where I live. Dalarna contains one of Sweden's most traditional landscapes where old forests, extended fields, lakes and rivers have shaped the memory of countless generations.

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**Dr Lucy Worsley** until recently was joint chief curator at Historic Royal Palaces and is the author of several books. She has presented TV shows for various channels.

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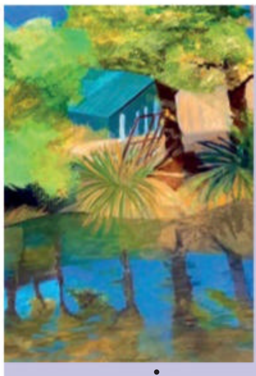

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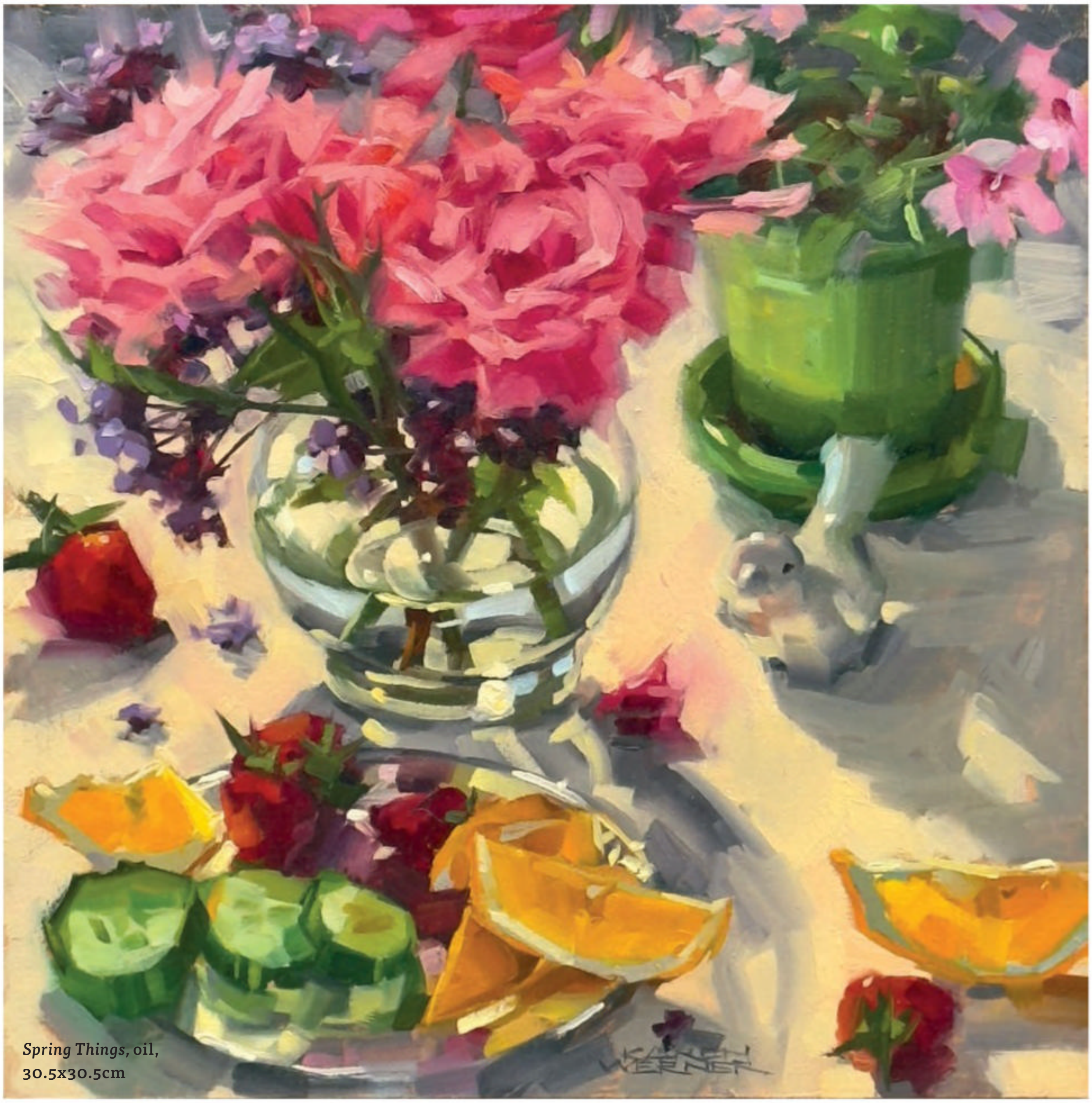

*Spring Things*, oil, 30.5x30.5cm

# Picture this

Every month, we ask an artist to tell us about a painting that is special to them. This month, we speak to American oil artist **KAREN WERNER**

I painted this last Spring when Southern California was in full swing. Our lemon and orange trees are loaded with blossoms, filling our backyard with their lovely fragrance. The roses are covered in blooms; some as large as my hand. The birds are singing and the sun is shining. I wanted to capture Spring's euphoria on canvas. I gathered roses and lemons from my garden, strawberries purchased from fields nearby and a cucumber from my kitchen. I arranged the objects and painted from life.

My style is contemporary impressionism. The hallmarks of impressionism include ordinary everyday subjects and visible brushstrokes. I believe my job as an artist is to help viewers see the beauty in the ordinary things around them that perhaps they have never noticed. I'm particularly drawn to the colours of natural things such as vegetables, fruits and flowers.

I lighted the subject with warm direct light to give the painting light and shadow, and used large brushes and efficient, direct brushwork to keep a freshness in the work. I kept the colours clean by leaving my strokes alone and wiping my brush frequently. It was painted *alla prima*; finished while all the paint was still wet. All of this serves to produce a feeling of light and freshness. The little white ceramic bird represents life. I have included birds in many of my still life paintings. I hope this piece reminds viewers of the beauty of creation and the hope of new beginnings.

***karenwernerart.com*** ◻

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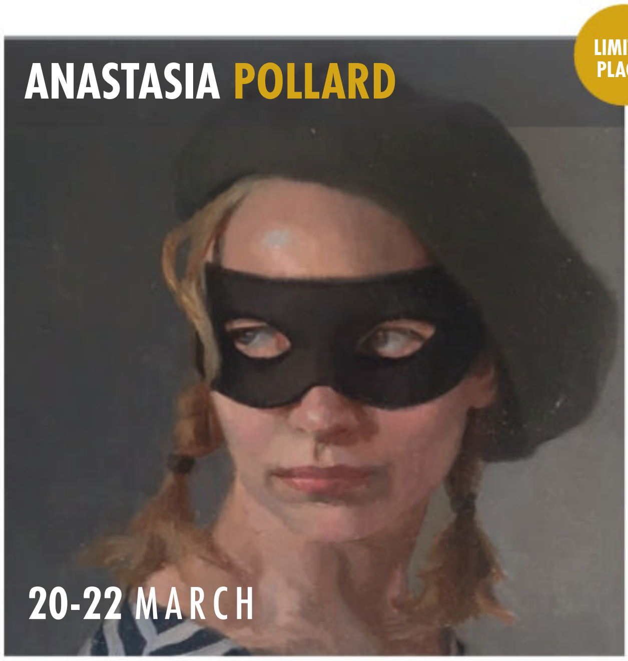

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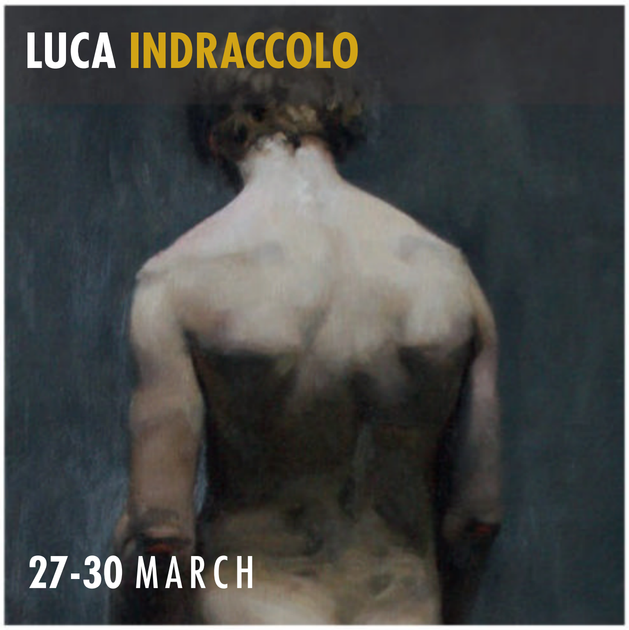

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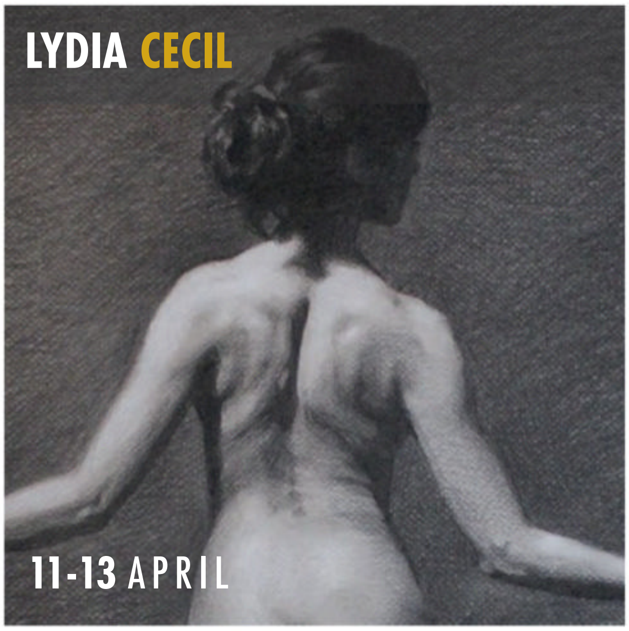

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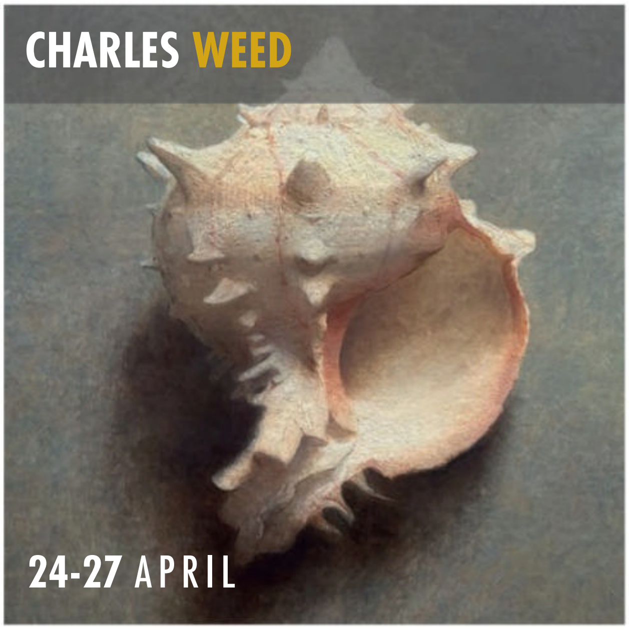

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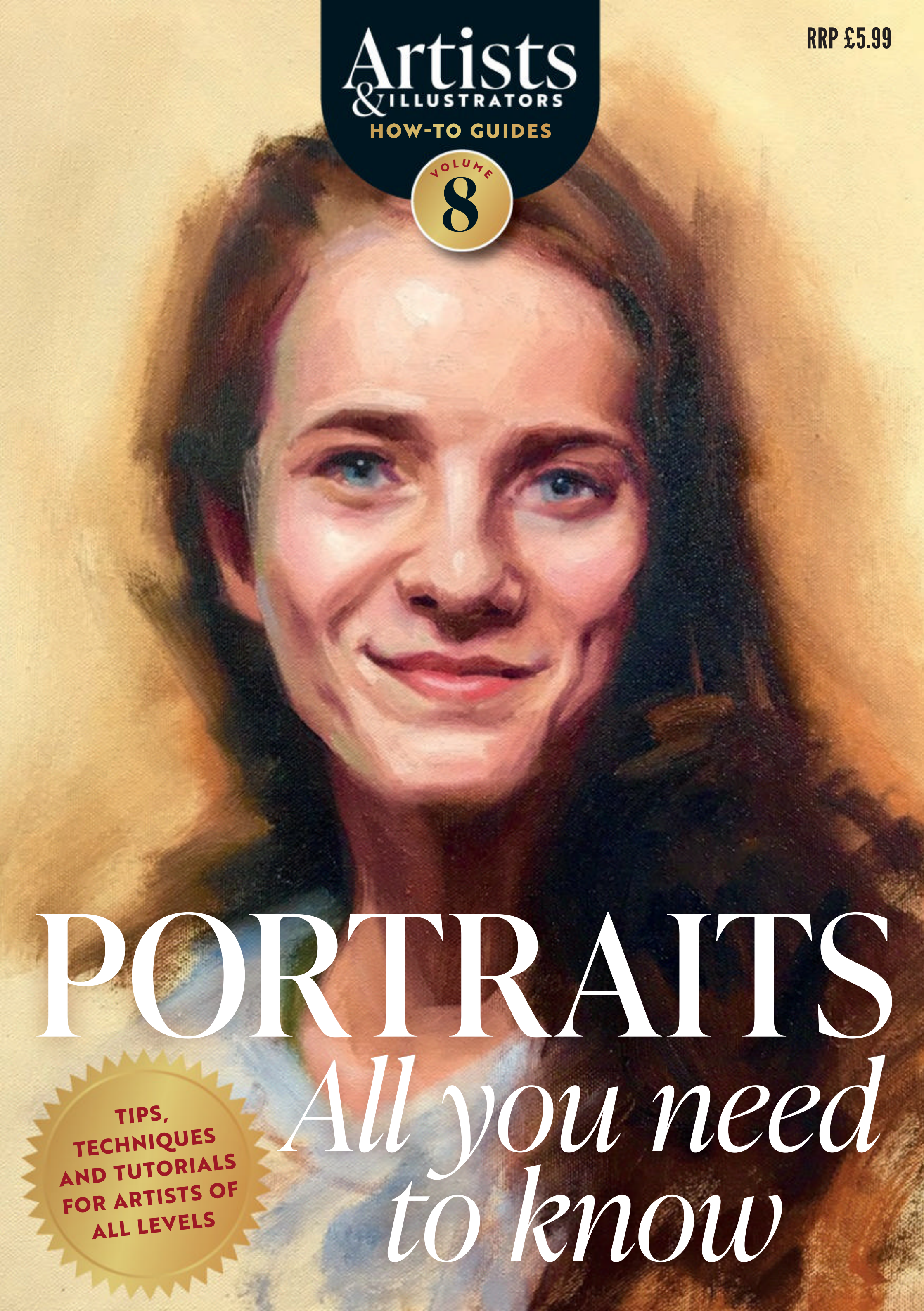

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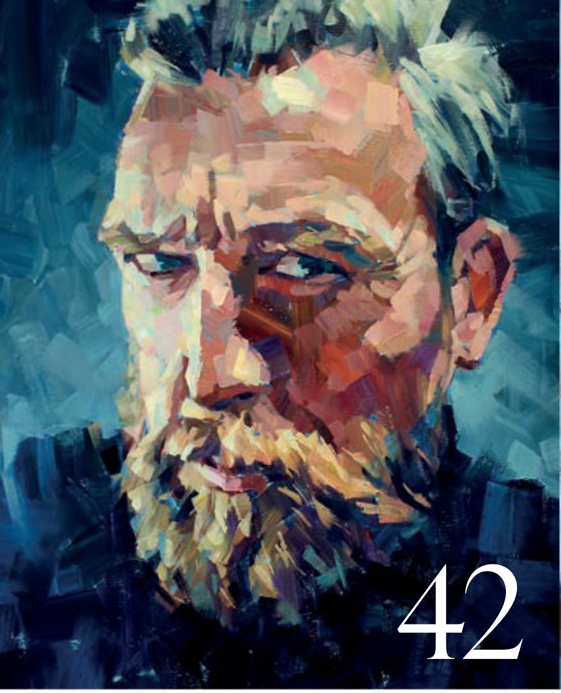
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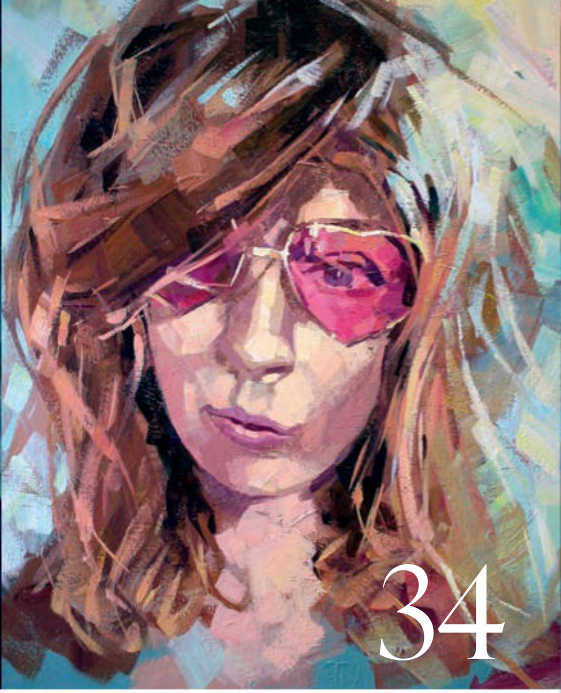
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# The face is the most expressive part of the human body...

making it both the most crucial aspect of drawing people and the trickiest obstacle for any artist. Worry not, as *Portraits All you need to know* will help you overcome and master such a challenge!

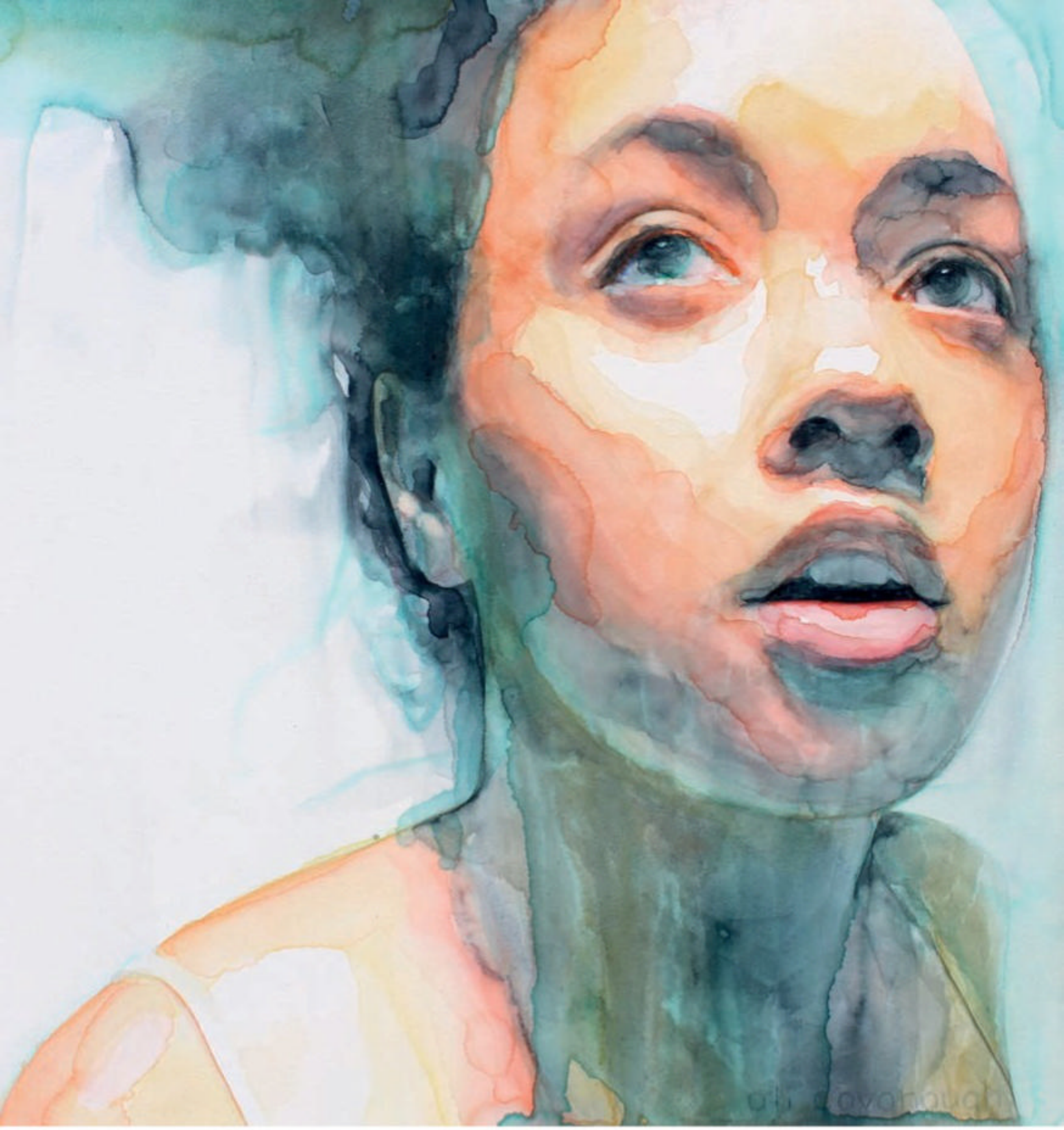
With instructions and step-by-step projects for creating an array of portraits, this all-inclusive supplement covers everything about portraiture, one of the most popular drawing and painting topics. Ideal for all artists who would like to experiment with different mediums, it will teach you how to create expressive and realistic faces in watercolour, pastel, oil and acrylic.

Afraid of painting yourself? James Otto Allen shares why you are your own best model so embrace your face! Then, Aine Divine describes how mixing mediums can have some of the most surprising creative effects whilst Roxanna Halls and Sue Spaull share the tricks they tell their students on mastering portraiture.

In the practical section, Peter Keegan tells you that it's not necessarily all about the details, whilst Hashim Akib stars in a four-part series with his expert advice on creating expressive portraits. For him, it's about colour, brushwork and vibrancy.

Specially compiled for aspiring artists and hobbyists, this detailed guide explores the must-know tips, tricks and techniques to help you create a wide range of bold and beautiful portraits. With a step-by-step approach that nurtures your inspiration while guiding you through fundamental painting methods, readers will discover a rich source of vital information. Let's get you started and your portraits on to the next level!

**Niki Browes** Editor



# Ali Cavanaugh

The far-reaching effects of childhood illness and an unusual choice of paint surface bring extra vitality to this American artist's engaging portraits, as **Martha Alexander** discovers

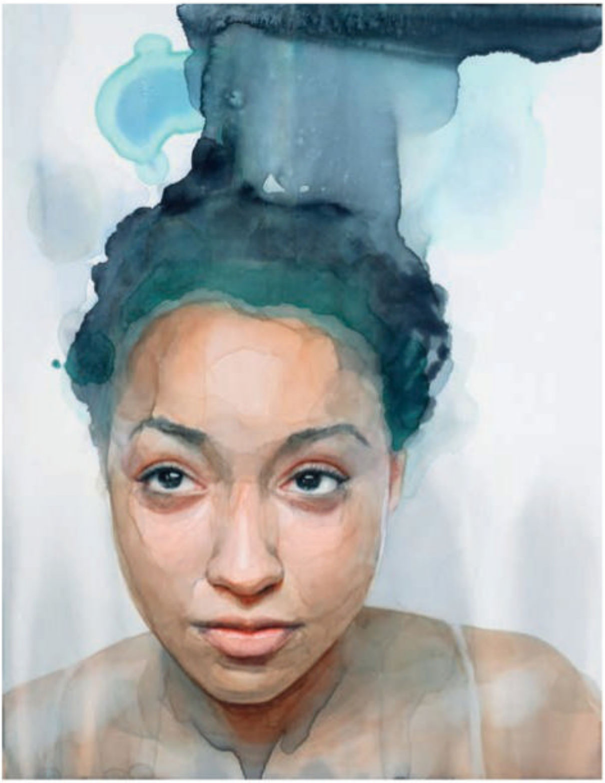
Babies grin gummily, seemingly submerged deep inside inky pools of turquoise. Women lie back in washes of magenta or violet. Then the focus changes as if the lens of a camera has been switched and there's a paisley headscarf in crisp detail, or the sepia back of a girl with long, dark plaits.

Ali Cavanaugh's paintings, which almost exclusively feature women and children, have a luminous quality, an otherworldly glow, and yet they are powerfully real. They embody an acute sensitivity and seem to offer a glimpse into a hyper-reality.

More than 200 of the Missouri-based artist's pieces are gathered into a hardback book, *Modern Fresco Paintings*, showcasing her working life over the past 11 years. "It is a milestone and encompasses a big era in my life," she says of the book, which is as dense and light and inviting and secretive as her paintings, adding that she wants to enjoy and reflect on this feat, before getting back to making new work. Whether crisp photorealism or the newer, freer portraits, her figurative paintings all boast a rare quality that makes her stand out.

Ali lost much of her hearing at the age of two having contracted spinal meningitis, and it is this paucity of a major sense that, she believes, might have contributed to her ultimately honing one of her others: vision.

"The hearing loss forced me to depend largely on lip reading and body language to communicate," she says. "As I grew older, I naturally gravitated to visual interests. I started painting portraits in my teen years and knew that I wanted to go to art school and make painting my career."

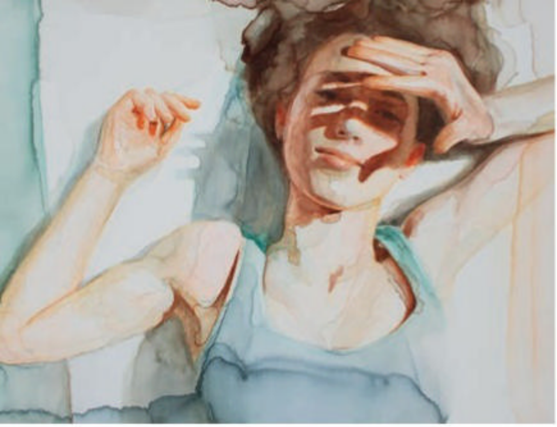


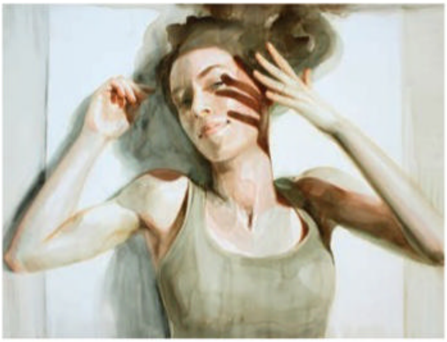
**LEFT** ***Eutierra*****, watercolour on clay, 30x30cm**
**ABOVE** ***Underneath*****, watercolour on clay, 28x35cm**

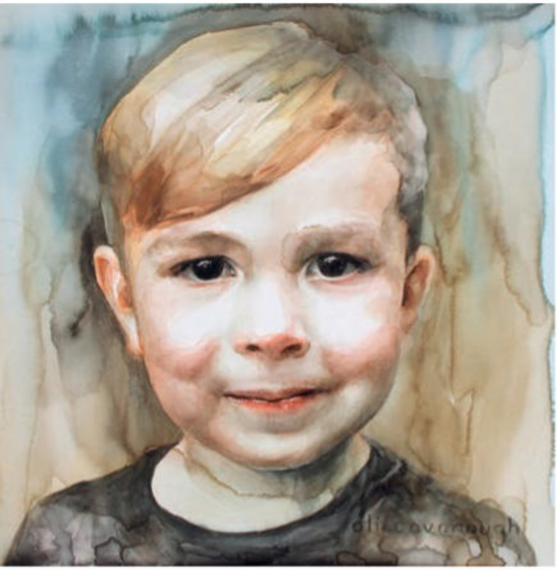
After graduating from Michigan's Kendall College of Art and Design in 1995, she was invited to stay on and teach in the continuing education programme. It was here that she and another instructor decided to set up their own atelier, teaching "apprentices" in an old church within a vineyard. However, after several years, Ali wanted to focus completely on her own painting.

And she did, feeling her way until she happened upon her own technique, the one she has remained fascinated with – and faithful to – for more than a decade. Watercolour on clay is unusual for a portrait artist and a far cry from the methods she used in her early career when she painted mainly in oils on wood.

"A barter in 2006 forced me into painting a ▸







**TOP** *Study for Evermore*, **watercolour on clay, 20x25cm MIDDLE** *Evermore*, **watercolour on clay, 76x102cm BOTTOM** *Jude*, **watercolour on clay, 20x20cm**

family portrait in watercolour on paper," she recalls. "By mistake, the art supply store gave me an extra sheet of paper. With that extra paper, I did some experimental studies. I painted some simple monochromatic figures. The success of those studies led me to paint a whole series on paper. The interest in my watercolours was like nothing I'd ever had before so at that point I began to take watercolour seriously."

It was around this time that Ali was fixing up a house in Santa Fe, trowelling plaster onto the interior walls. "This got me thinking about fresco," she recalls. "Wasn't fresco just water-based pigment on wet plaster? I found kaolin clay before discovering a company making kaolin clay panels for artists. I immediately ordered some."

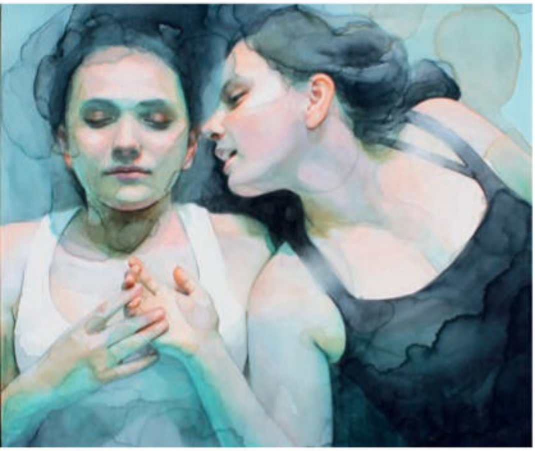
The technique she uses is very much like that of the traditional fresco secco – essentially applying pigment to cured plaster. However, all of the materials are modern: either Holbein or QoR watercolours on a panel that has a polymer-fortified clay veneer. "The surface that I paint on is very forgiving," says Ali. "The polymer makes the pigment easy to lift. The watercolour blooms, and does unpredictable things, but I can remove the areas that I do not like. I can blend and soften and then add more pigment to build up depth."

Her chosen palettes are serene; a careful consideration of colour and tone. The paintings are calm too, even those with a black background and with punchy blocks of colour. How does she manage colour so beautifully?

"Balance is everything. To compose a painting, the artist has to dance gracefully with the paint in the format of the panel. I cannot give a formula or explanation as to how I balance colour, it's just something I feel."

Layering transparent washes of colour onto the white clay surface creates a luminous effect when seen in the flesh, as if her paintings are backlit almost. A final layer of UV varnish is applied so that the watercolour can be displayed in a frame without glass.

Like many painters, Ali's work is anchored in drawing. "I use watercolour in a drawing-based



***The Visitation*, watercolour on clay, 46x46cm**

technique," she says, which has resulted in people mistaking her work for coloured pencil drawings. However, she doesn't warm up by sharpening pencils for a spot of sketching first and instead launches right in. "My vision is pretty clear".

Instead of having a sketchbook Ali uses her phone as a digital journal, taking photos of things that inspire her or might be useful to her painting later down the line. Each larger painting takes roughly a week to complete, although sometimes much longer thanks to a host of variables including the unpredictable nature of watercolour as a medium and whether a likeness is caught early.

The soothing nature of Ali's paintings is at odds with the busy life this mother-of-three's school-age children inhabit. Her daily routine involves a 6 am start for laundry and the school run, then keeping on top of her emails before settling down to start painting after lunch. After breaking for dinner and family time, Cavanaugh will return to her studio for a few more hours before bed.

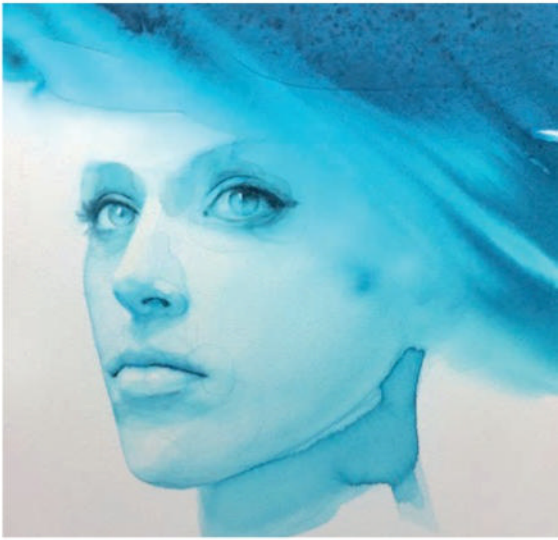
Life is busy, but one gets the impression this is exactly as she'd like it. Although she has two studios, she tends to do most of her work in her home studio – a light, open space with little more than a desk and an easel (and countless vessels including empty yoghurt pots as well as white ceramic tiles which serve as her palette).

However, it is not a space she considers private or particularly tranquil. "I've got another table and cabinet set up for the kids. Their creative process can get very messy at times and can very quickly take over the room, but I wouldn't want it any other way. Their presence in the room inspires me and keeps my studio full of energy."

Ali definitely practises what she preaches. One of her top tips for fledgling artists is exactly what she has done – carving out one's own niche.

"One of the easiest ways to set one's work apart is to develop a technique, or to apply the paint in a unique way," she says. "You should be looking to create your own recipe. It's your trade secret and it will be that something special that sets your work apart."

Despite having alighted on a very successful technique of her own, Ali has strong ideas about how her work might evolve and she is hoping to experiment with encaustic painting – the process of mixing pigment and heated beeswax with pigment to use as paint. "It's good to be in a constant state of micro-evolution, so I'm looking forward to challenging myself and making new discoveries. ◻



***Astral*, watercolour on clay, 20x20cm**

# Perfect figures

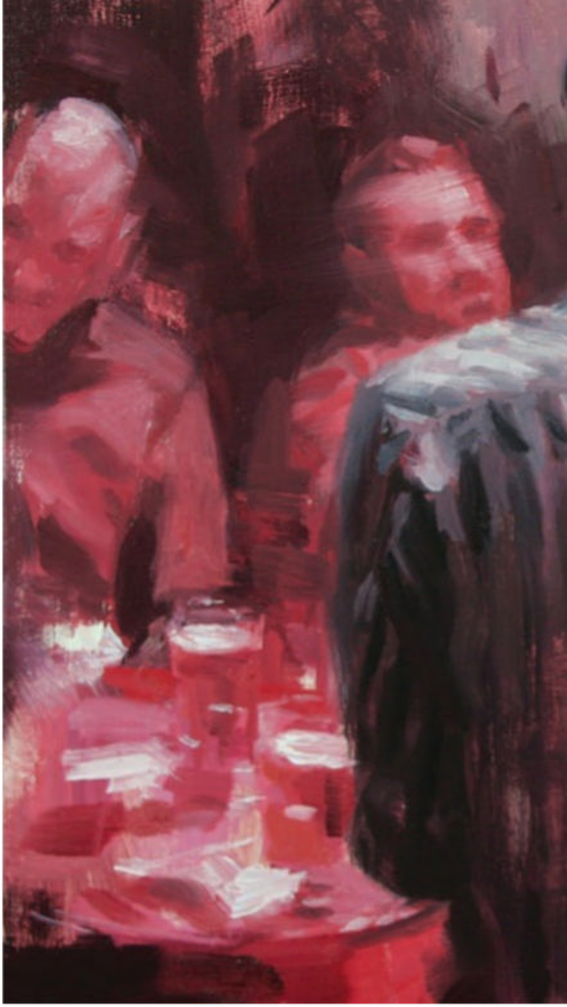
Artist **Aldo Balding**'s quick guide will help you achieve better results

1 Painting a subject because it is beautiful or stimulating isn't enough. You must first identify with precision what it is you want to convey, whether it is the effect of light, colour, pattern, movement, line or something more philosophical – a message, a dream.

2 When painting from life, you must learn to see. In other words, to observe objectively; not see subjectively. The ateliers of classical realism teach the sight-size method, which involves observing a model and painting from a set distance. The easel is placed next to the subject and you paint life-size. It is easier to compare your painting – as well as judge drawing, values and colour – when you view the subject and easel this way. I have found it beneficial and the results are more realistic.

3 You need to measure all the time, whether visually or empirically, to improve your judgement. I measure with the brush at arm's length using my thumb and the end as markers. Draw first and check second; it helps your drawing.□

*See more of Aldo's art and find out where he is teaching at aldobalding.com*



**ABOVE:** ***Alizarin Bar*, oil on linen, 40x50cm**

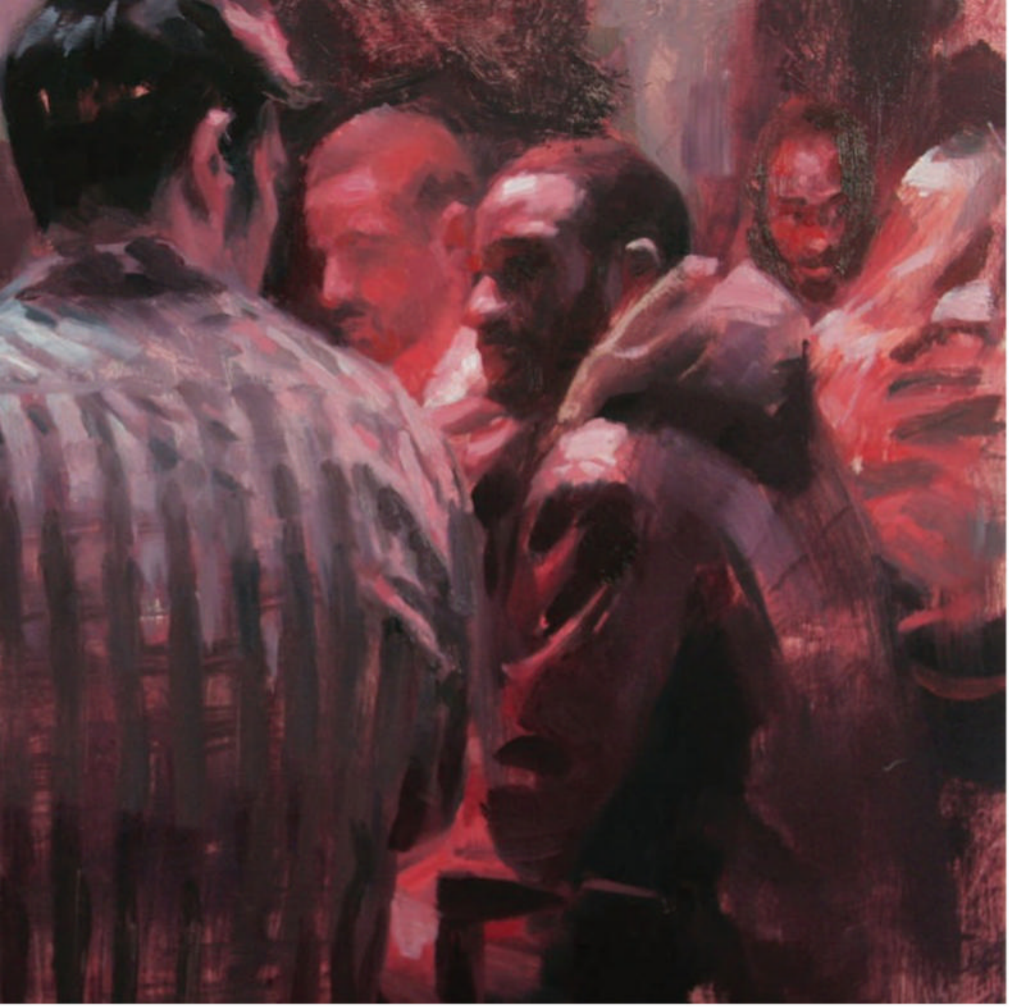
## Help is at hand

**Aldo recommends materials and resources to help you improve your paintings**

### WATCH AND LEARN

I am self-taught but there were lots of inspiring books and videos which helped me learn. Richard Schmid's *Alla Prima: Everything I Know About Painting* is a great source of knowledge, alongside his videos.

More than 10 years ago, I was lucky enough to receive the Daniel Gerhartz's video *Her Mother's Locket* as a



present. It was the first time that I saw a great artist paint. There are many other videos from great artists such as Jeremy Lipking and Quang Ho. ***richardschmid.com; danielgerhartz.com; lipking.com; quangho.com***

### PERFECT PAINT

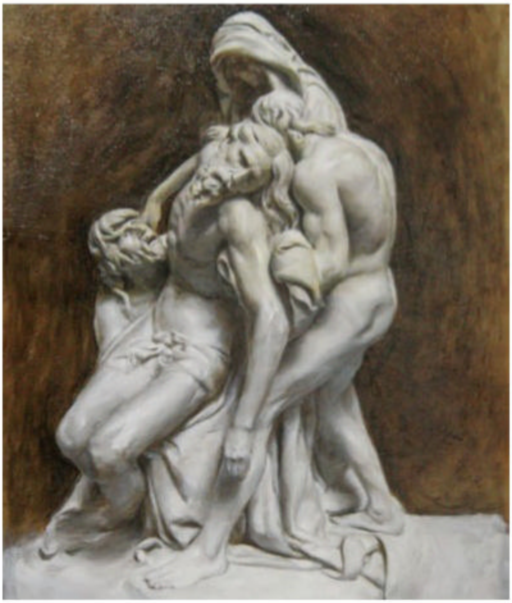
Michael Harding oil paints are rich in pigment, last well and have beautiful consistency. I use them runny to begin with and then, as I progress a painting, without medium. ***michaelharding.co.uk***

### THE BEST BRUSHES

My preferred brushes are Rosemary & Co's long flat series 279 classic filberts and series 308 hog hairs. The longer hairs hold more paint and the bristles have a nice spring. The series 279 flats have a beautiful knife edge. If you want the paint to have texture when painting *alla prima*, use bristles that expose the layer. ***rosemaryandco.com***

### SUPER SUPPORT

I mainly use linen with three coats of oil primer to prevent absorption so the paint rests on the surface where you can manipulate it. Belle Arti is a good make of oil-primed, stretched canvas. ***jacksonsart.com***



*Pieta Sculpture*, oil on canvas, 50x40cm

# Self-portraits

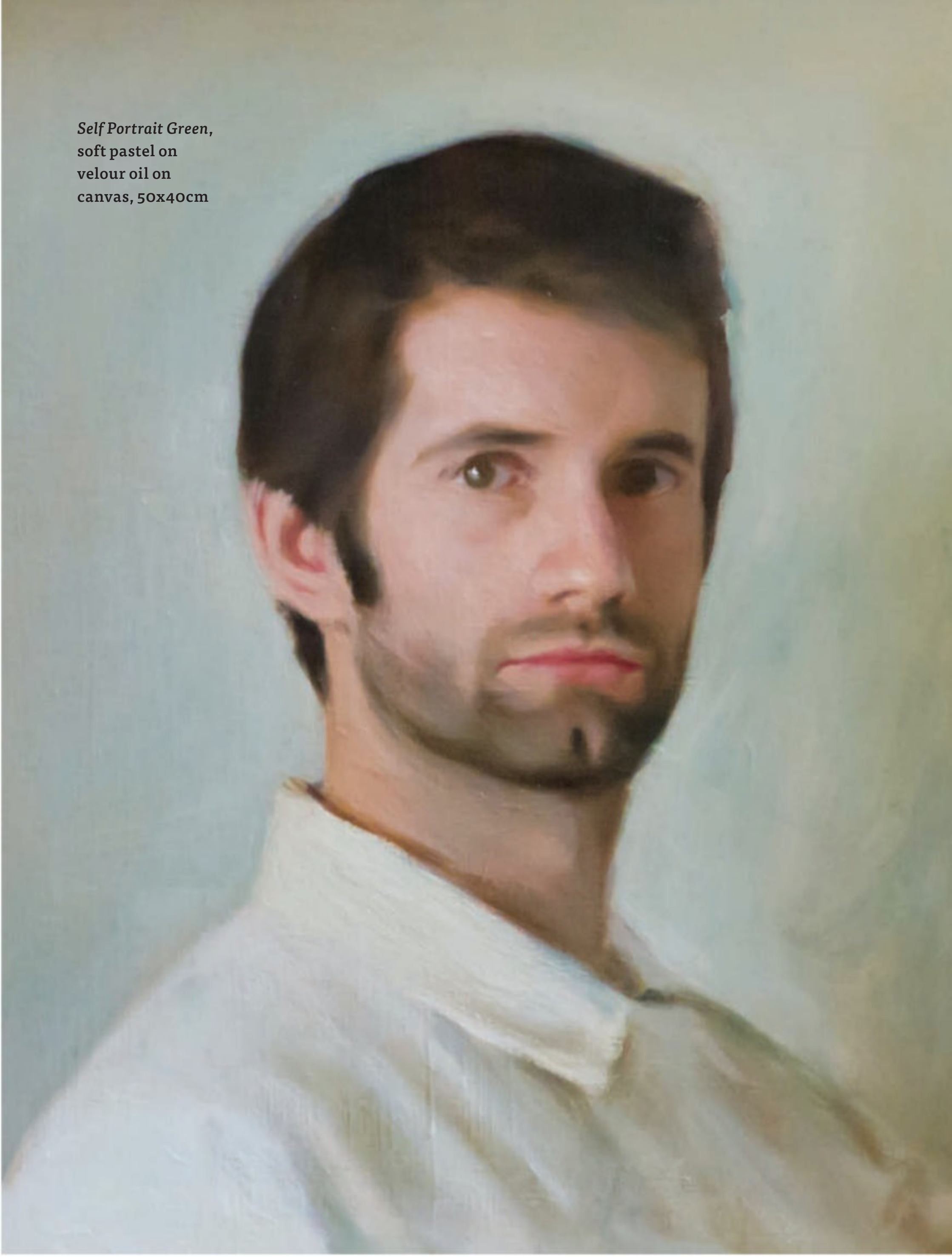
Figurative artist **James Otto Allen** answers your queries about creating satisfying likenesses

**What's a good starting point for painting from life – an entry-level challenge?**
Painting a plaster cast is a great way to start. They are useful to work with because they don't move and there are no complex colours to deal with, as there would be with a still life or a life model. It's mainly black and white with some reflected colours. Small portable plaster casts can be found for a reasonable price to serve as a reusable training tool.

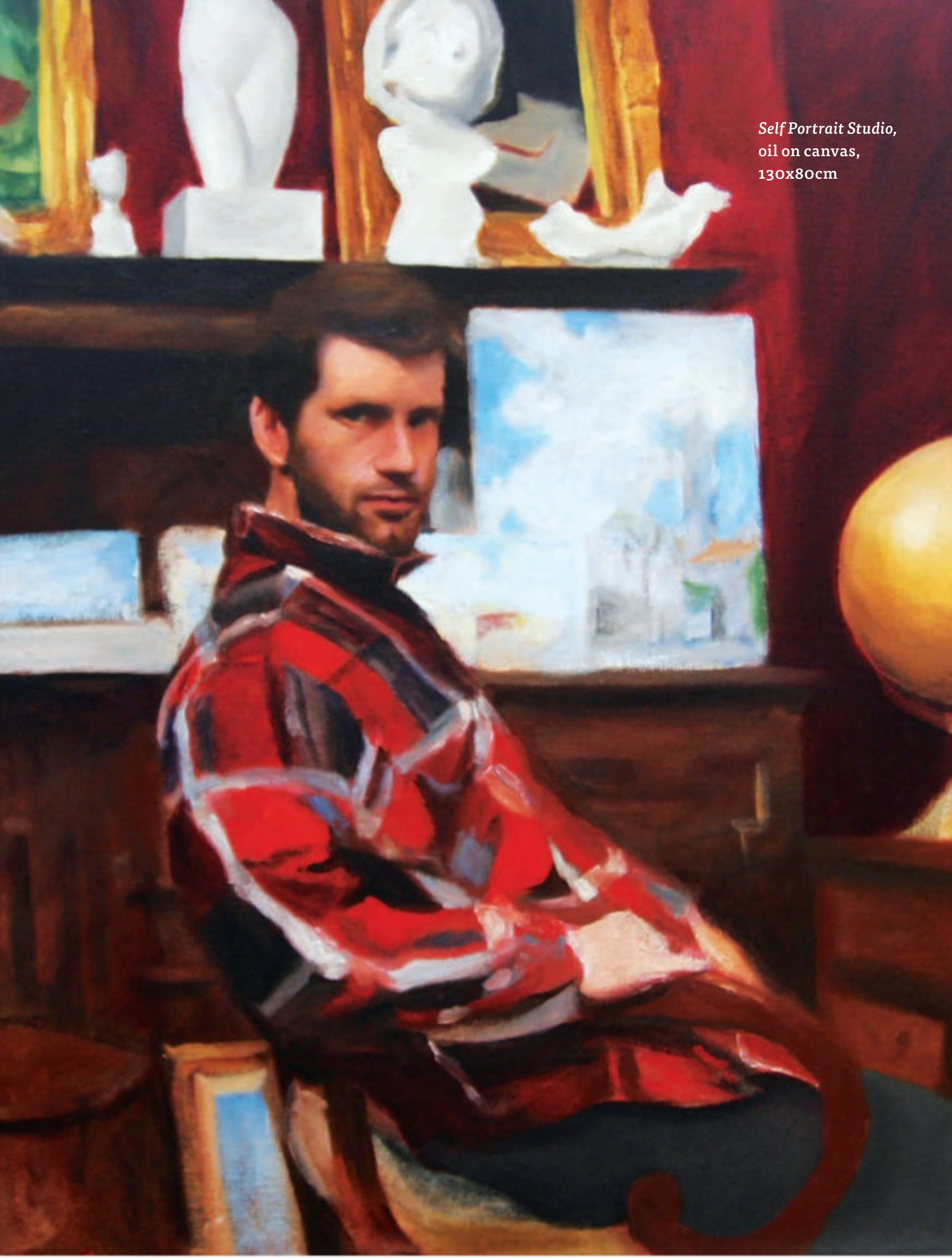
**What are the benefits of working from life over reference photos?**
I find photographs do not capture the richness and subtlety of colour the way my eyes can. Working from life, for example, I won't miss the warmth of a person's cheek or the cooler colours of their temples. In particular, working with colours in shadow is much easier from life, since photographs often flatten shadows, removing the colours that show form and depth. However, photographs are useful to map the start of a painting.

**Why should I paint a self-portrait?**
It gives you unlimited access to a life model and you will learn everything from colour mixing to paint application. You can practise techniques and experiment with poses without the pressure of the model's opinion about how you have portrayed him or her.

**How can I bring more character to my portraits and create an expressive face?**
When you're concentrating on painting, your face will naturally assume its own quite frank, sincere expression, and this is the ideal. If you think too ▶



*Self Portrait Green*, soft pastel on velour oil on canvas, 50x40cm



*Self Portrait Studio,*
oil on canvas,
130x80cm

much about it or try to force an expression, it will not only be difficult to maintain, but may also make the picture look gimmicky.

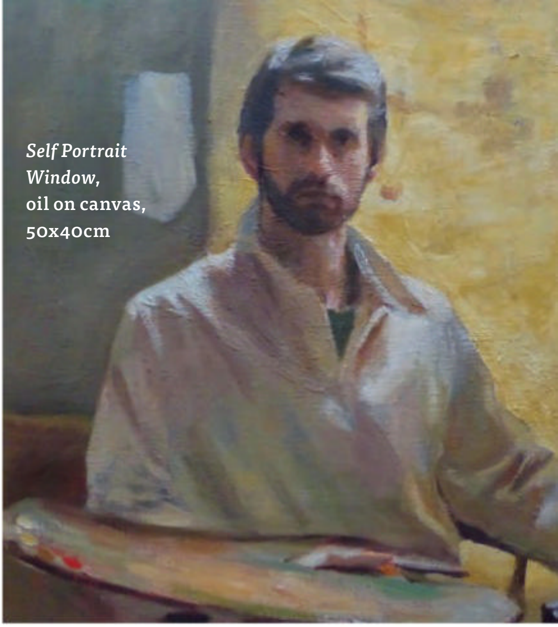
**How do you achieve the soft layers seen in some of your works?**
This is achieved by the layering technique, typically seen in the work of Velázquez. As you evaluate your position and return to your painting, each brushstroke captures a new image, which has naturally moved, even if only by a fraction of a millimetre. The apparent softness is important because it creates a distinction between photorealism, or a photograph, which has managed to freeze time.

**How can I improve my observation skills?**
It may sound obvious, but look a lot. Observation skills are related more to what you see than what you reproduce. Always keep a sketchbook handy and draw as much as you can. Don't be precious about the drawings: they serve as observational exercises and keep you training.

**Do you have any advice for working with a sitter?**
Choose someone whose face inspires you. Be accommodating, allowing breaks when they are needed. You don't want your sitter to be uncomfortable or it will show in the portrait.

**What basic palette should I work with for portraits?**
It should be all-natural earth colours: Yellow Ochre, Light Red, Burnt Sienna, Cobalt Blue, Vermillion Red, Raw Umber and some Flake White. These colours are fast drying and 'safe' – they won't crack or fade. British painter and a founding member of the New English Art Club, Solomon J Solomon, advised using these, stating that you can achieve any colour with this palette.

**Do you have any advice for mixing skin tones?**
Mix with a palette knife then hold it up to the area of skin you are painting. If the palette knife disappears, you've got the colour correct. Creating a skin tone is no different to mixing any colour. You're trying to evaluate and recreate the hue (colour) and value (black and whiteness) of a colour you see with your eyes onto a canvas.


*Self Portrait Window*, oil on canvas, 50x40cm

**What brushes and materials do you use?**
I use a range of hog-hair brushes, including long, flat brushes and round brushes, in varying sizes. My basic palette is as mentioned previously, with paints produced by Michael Harding and Old Holland. □
***jamesottoallen.com***

## JAMES' SELF-PORTRAIT TIPS

### FIND THE RIGHT POSITION

Get into a comfortable pose, as it is easier to maintain. I like a three-quarter-turned pose, with the head pointing towards the mirror and canvas. You can keep your head still because your eyes just need to move between mirror and canvas

### KEEP IT SIMPLE

Don't overdo the background. Busyness can detract from the face

### USE NATURAL LIGHT

Paint in natural light. This will ensure that the colours are richer

# What is a portrait?

Artists and tutors **Roxana Halls** and **Sue Spaull** talk to *Sally Hales* about how they help students explore painting

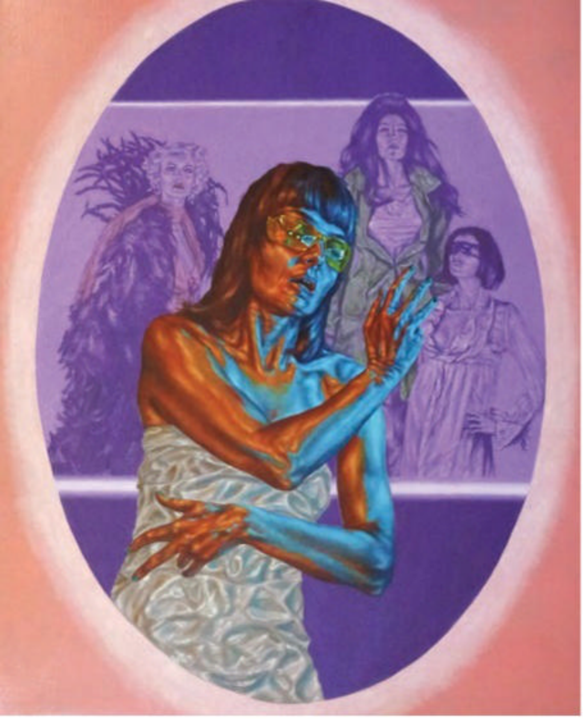
For artist Roxana Halls, the work in her most recent show, Threesome, saw her take the unusual step of working with other painters. To create the exhibition, the artist, Sadie Lee and Sarah Jane Moon painted themselves, each other and performer Ursula Martinez for a project that interrogates the female gaze. "I generally explore my own concerns and have solo shows," says Roxana, "so it was quite a new framework."

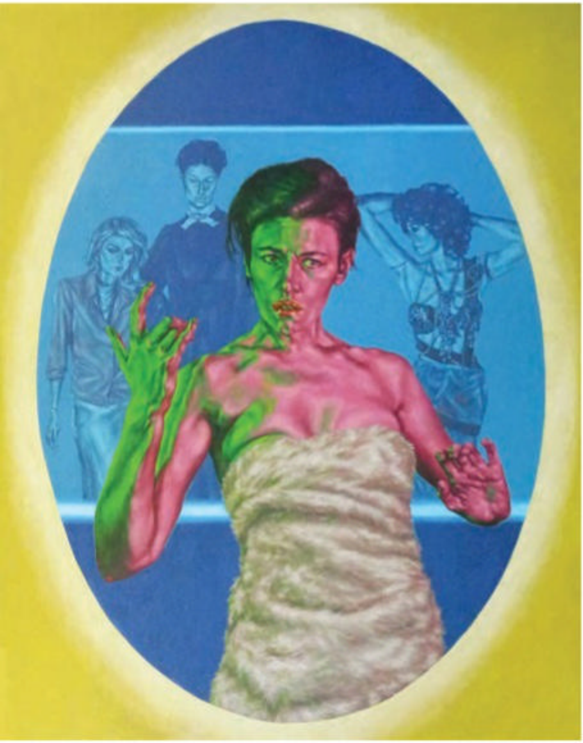
And investigating new ways of working is at the heart of her role as Course Leader for Contemporary Portraiture at London's The Art Academy. The only course of its kind in the UK, the foundation diploma has studio practice at its core with much higher than average teaching hours – almost 24 hours a week – compared to other art schools. This means Roxana and her fellow tutors have a deep understanding of how to help portrait painters drive their practice. "All of us feel portraiture is a genre that could be expanded and is potentially much broader, encompassing a whole range of materials and approaches," says Sue Spaull, Director of Programmes at The Art Academy.

Roxana agrees that, to find their own style, artists must open up to new ideas and experiment. "Everyone has their own handwriting in a way," she says, "but how do you find that? Unless you break out of what you think that you know, and your self-consciousness around the idea of what your style is, you're not going to find what is individual about you."

For Roxana, teaching contemporary portraiture is about both the structured approach to learning skills and exploration. She adds: "We help students develop some kind of clarity about what's particular about them but, from the outset, we approach things from an experimental point of view." As part of the core programme, students are asked to respond to a series of briefs. "This is an interesting, stretching project," says Roxana. "They are asked to bring in an artwork that they find inspiring, and produce three works in response to that." These can take any form, including films and three-dimensional objects; she is currently working with a student using musical notation. It's about helping artists to think about process, says Sue: "Even if they then come back to being painters, it informs ideas and thinking because they've thought about it conceptually."

Often the challenge means encouraging people to be prepared to fail. "Sometimes people come with a skill set that might be highly tuned so they want to hold on to that," says Roxana. "I persuade them to try something they're less good at and, often, there will be a whole other skill set that arises. You have to let yourself fail." But a two-year adventure in portraiture with Roxana and her colleagues is sure to set painters on the path to success.□





**ABOVE** Students get hands-on at The Art Academy in London **TOP LEFT** *Threesome I*, oil on linen, 140x110cm **BOTTOM LEFT** *Threesome II*, oil on linen, 140x110cm

## ROXANA'S PORTRAIT PAINTING TIPS

### SWITCH YOUR MEDIUM

Consider how you might stretch and develop your range by attempting to make images with mediums and approaches that are unfamiliar to you. It may surprise you into a new way of working

### WORK FROM LIFE

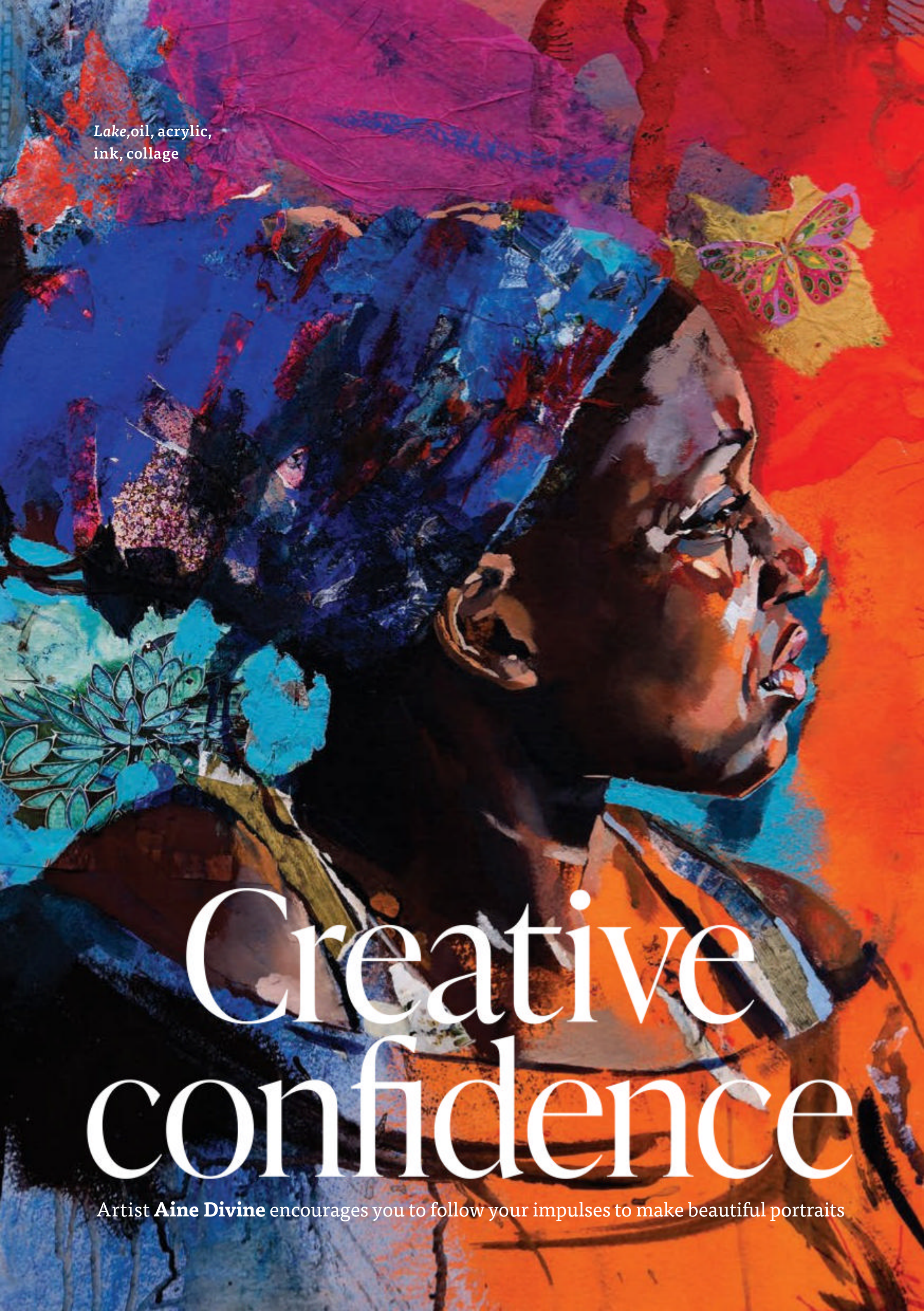
If you have grown accustomed to using photography, try not to go too long without working observationally from life. Dealing with 'true' colour and depth rather than the compressed image, plus the constraints of your model's time and patience, are the best technique builders

### MAKE TIME TO CHAT

Interview your sitter before starting a portrait. Everyone has a tale to tell and a small detail could inform the direction of your painting and make it more interesting

### TAKE LOTS OF PHOTOGRAPHS

When taking reference photographs, maintain communication to keep your model animated. Always take more shots than you think you will need



*Lake*,oil, acrylic, ink, collage

# Creative confidence

Artist **Aine Divine** encourages you to follow your impulses to make beautiful portraits

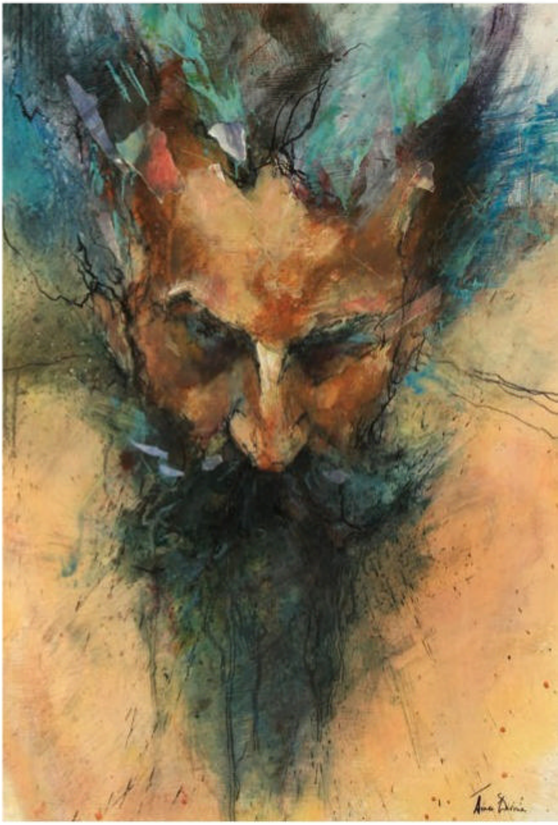
I mused over this article, wondering how worthwhile it is when there are no steps showing the progress of the paintings. Then I remembered, especially with mixed media, the process is evident in the finished painting. It's there in every layer, ready to be picked apart and explained in detail. This is my opportunity to explain why mixed media holds such appeal for me. It's a spontaneous slapping-on of whatever works to convey what I'm seeing and feeling. It keeps the creative impulse alive. It is common knowledge that our creative brains respond well to novelty.

This brings me to the painting *Lake* (left). This riot of colour marked the end of a barren period for me. Fed up with the self-flagellating that accompanies a blocked phase, I took to colour to ease the rigidity that had set in. Dripping bright-red acrylic ink over some sponged-on transparent orange felt good. Engaging the physical body seemed important. Kneeling on the floor I sponged and dripped on paint, then tilted the board in my outstretched arms while blowing the ink. I felt I was pouring myself into the work.

## FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

Once a gung-ho attitude was adopted, commitment and snap decisions came easy. I was in my power. I easily moved into drawing *Lake* with the acrylic paint. With an inky consistency that is still visible in the top, I drew her striking head. Then I painted the back of the neck and shadows on the skin in dark acrylic paint – a mix of Ultramarine Blue and Burnt Sienna. The Cerulean Blue background meets the neck on both sides. This clarified the form of the head and gave me a licence to apply the torn magazine images to the background behind the head. Cobalt Blue applied with a large household brush explains the headscarf in a few bold moves.

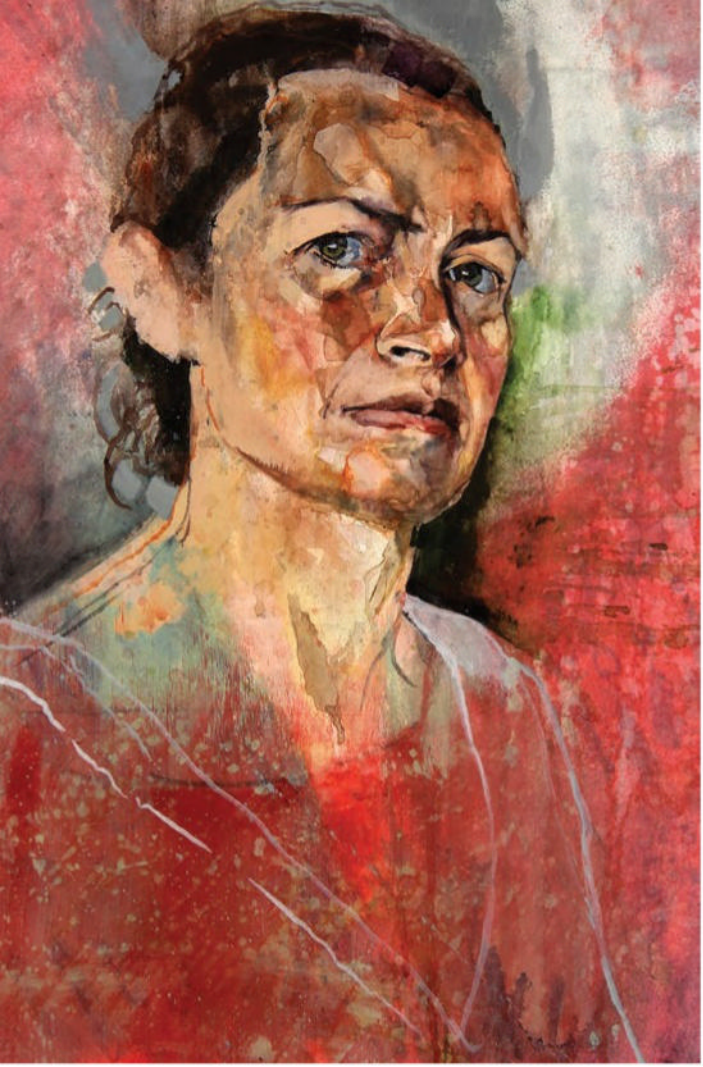
At this stage, vigour and freedom of expression were essential. I followed my intuition and, fuelled by curiosity, a kind of creative frenzy occurred. F Scott Fitzgerald said: "Write drunk; revise sober." This is similar to the attitude I recommend. There will be plenty of time for more considered mark-making later in the process. But first, it's a leap into the unknown, allowing things to happen that you're not in complete control of. This way of working is about more than a technique. We nourish our souls through creative practice; not just making pictures that look nice but willingly pouring ourselves onto the page. Mixed media is a gateway to this attitude.



**Michael Wildman**
**The skin-colour underpainting allowed me to explain the shape of the face swiftly. An ink line applied with a stick helped define form. Magazine pieces are glued to the hairline and beard. I love to work from the shoulder in bold sweeping moves, which gives energy to the hair and beard.**

## PATTERN, TONE, TEXTURE

For *Lake*, the torn butterfly napkin placed at her ▸



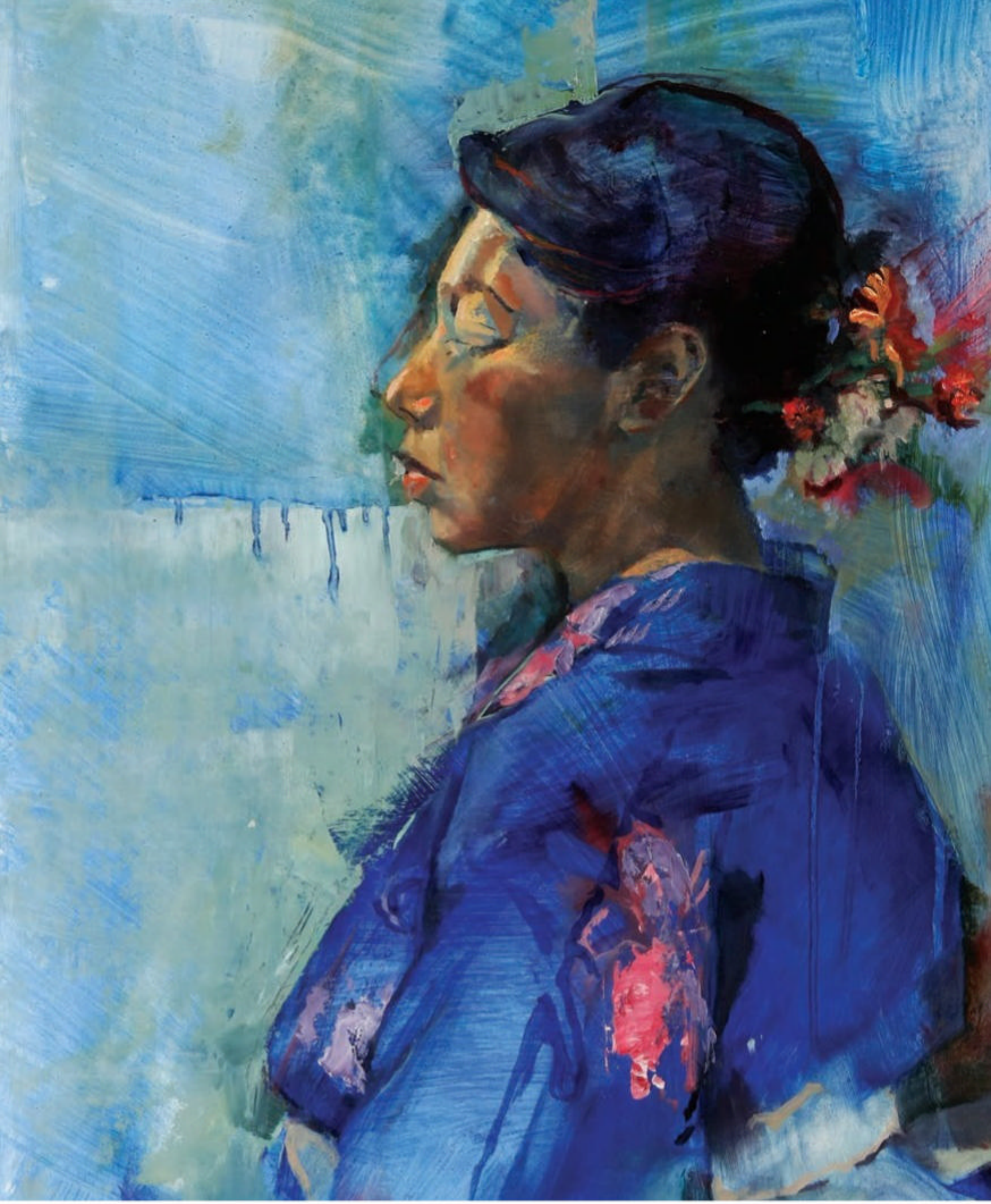
**Self Portrait 2**
**Acrylic and watercolour is an interesting combination. Acrylic can bring body and opaque contrast, helping the watercolour pattern to sing.**

forehead, the flashes of red feathers pasted to her scarf, the torn wallpaper for her T-shirt are impulsive moves made in a childlike spirit of adventure. When I was happy with the general pattern, tone and texture, I set my sights on explaining her glorious side profile. This is where oil paint came in. Lush and vibrant enough to hold its own against the vivid colour and pattern of the background, oil also allowed me to carve features in a satisfying way. Contrasting tones were used: darks where the face hollows and brighter tones where the skin catches light.

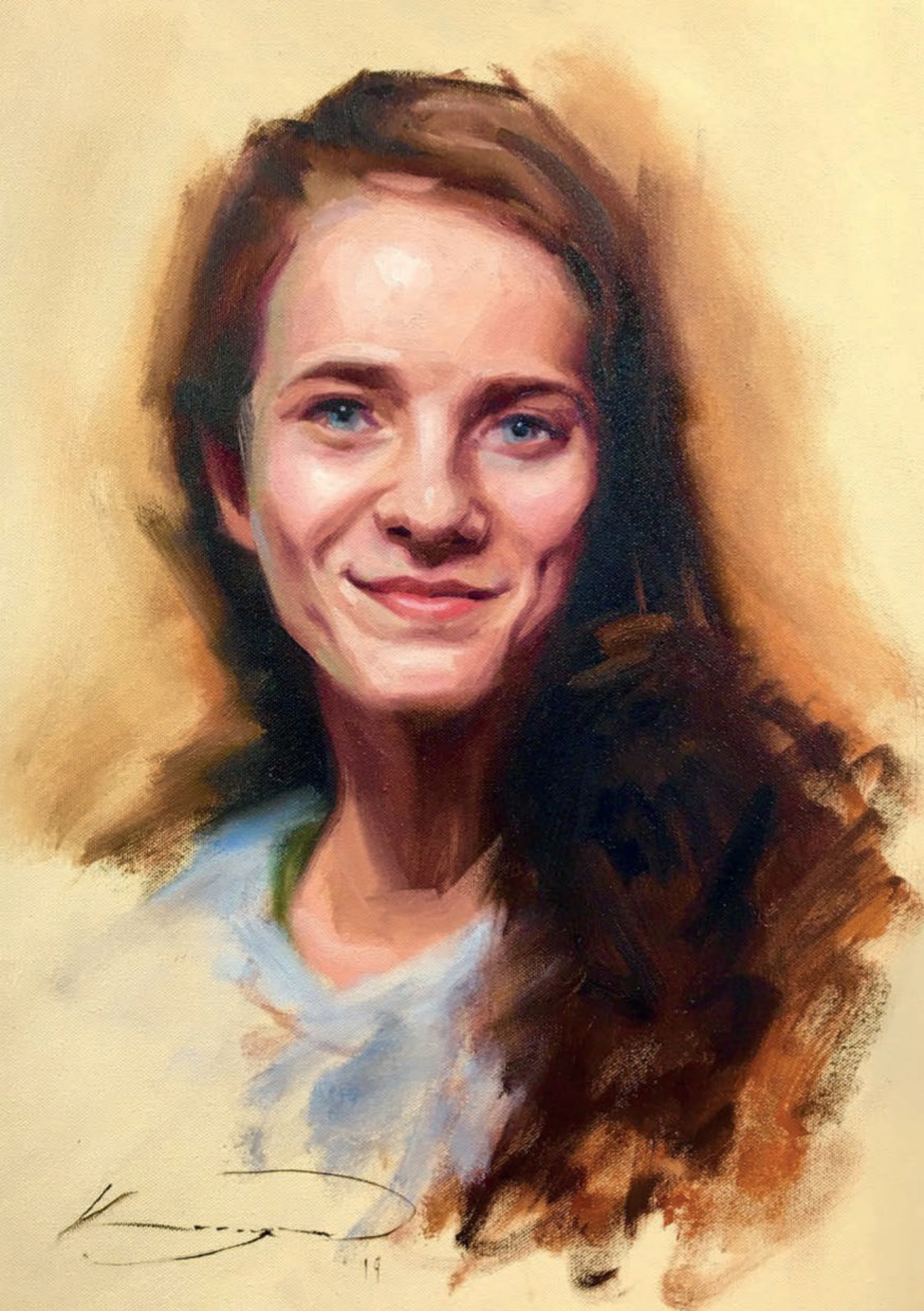
The orange underpainting still shows through in places, subdued by the high contrast of tone in the features. Look at the rich, dark eyelashes and eyebrows, and the light space of skin in-between. The light cheek meets the nostril's dark flesh, and the flash of light on the tip of the nose allows the face to extend into the surrounding space with conviction. We painters are conductors: we decide which section of our painting sings loudest, and which plays a supporting role.

I encourage you to pull out materials that you like the look or feel of. Get your hands dirty: kneel on the floor and paste, pour and print. Above all, just see what unfolds, one step at a time. I see the spontaneous and considered approaches as necessary. This painting was made over two days with a week between. The space between sittings allowed me to gauge what was working, what could be heightened and subdued. The uncensored moves early on created confidence, allowing me to approach the job of sculpting the face with courage, commitment and clarity. The result is a meeting of spontaneous self-expression, order and calm. This willingness to dive into chaos is good for our souls. Let mixed media take you on this journey into unknown territory. And there's no place for the inner critic on this trip. If he comes along, don't take him seriously. He knows nothing of joy. ◻

***ainedivinepaintings.co.uk; facebook.com/AineDivinePaintings***



**Ever Komachi**
The Ultramarine underpainting in this oil over acrylic goes a long way to convey the kimono and background feature. The flowers on the kimono and in the hair, plus the skin tones, have been described in oil. In places, the pattern in the acrylic layer gives form to the clothing – a happy accident.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# Portraits with life

Courtyard Art Studio's **Peter Keegan** shows you how to create a lively likeness of a person by holding back on details and focusing on tone

*Alla Prima* is Italian for "at the first" and in painting terms means completing a painting at once, in a single sitting or session. The overall aim is to capture an immediate impression of the subject in an uncomplicated and direct way. This direct way of painting is one of the great historic approaches to painting as observed in the work of everyone from Diego Velázquez and Frans Hals to Anders Zorn and John Singer Sargent.

Working in the *alla prima* method allows me to focus on what really matters – the shapes, tones and colours – while forgetting about the fussy details and the temptation of overworking. I love how this economical and exciting way of painting can really give life to a portrait, as if the sitter may turn and wink at you or even start a conversation at any moment.

This painting demonstration begins with a drawing using just the brush and builds using the two main traditional techniques when working with oils: painting dark to light and painting thin to thick. Although I have used oils for this portrait, these same traditional principles could also apply to acrylics.

However, if you are working with acrylics don't thin the paint with water as I thinned the oils with solvent.

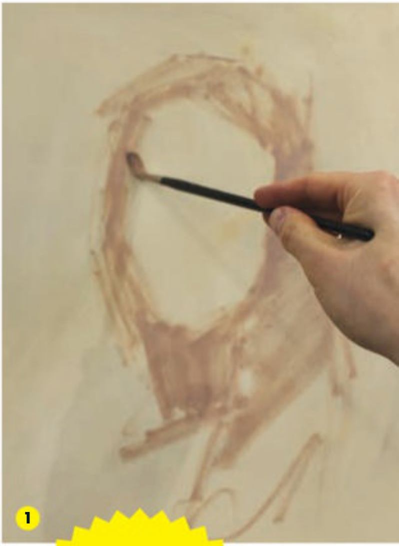
## PETER'S MATERIALS

**Paints**
Michael Harding oils: Titanium White, Yellow Ochre, Genuine Chinese Vermilion, Alizarin Crimson, Sap Green, Ultramarine Blue and Raw Umber

**Brushes**
Rosemary & Co hog filberts, sizes 2, 4, 8 and 12

**Canvas**
Winsor & Newton cotton canvas, 50x40cm

**Support**
Low odour solvent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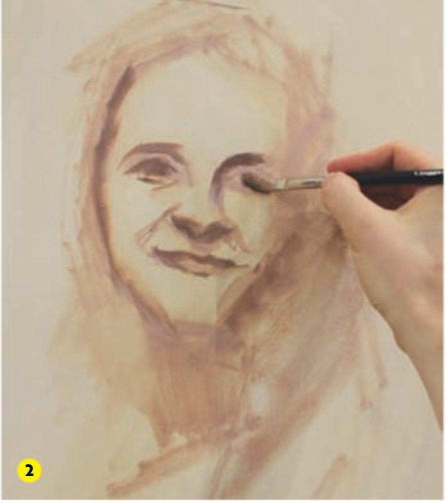
## TIP

**Draw out your initial composition with a brush, not a pencil – it keeps things fluid and painterly**

### 1 DRAW ROUGHLY

Begin by killing the white of the canvas with a wash of a mix of Yellow Ochre and Titanium White diluted with solvents. Once covered, wipe away the moisture with a rag so only the stain of the colour remains. Roughly draw the outline shape of the face using a thinned-down mixture of the Titanium White and Raw Umber.

Shade in the mass of hair and plot where the main facial features will go. Do this by squinting to focus on the shaded areas in your subject. Don't try to make it all look perfect at this stage, aim for more of a rough version of the head.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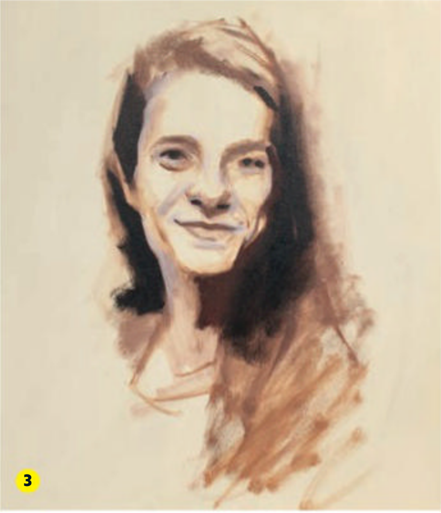
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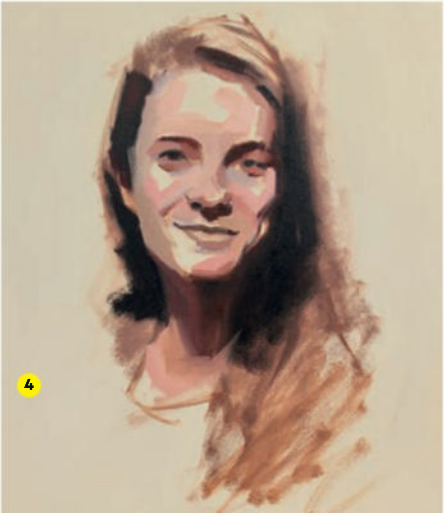
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### 2 PLOT THE FEATURES

Use the same mix as before, darkened with a little more Raw Umber, to plot the facial features more accurately. Again, you're not looking for a highly detailed painting here: these brown brushstrokes should simply suggest where the layers of flesh-coloured paint will go, rather than dictate exactly like a colouring-in book. Accuracy-wise, aim for approximately 80%, leaving room for further improvement later on.

### 3 PAINT THE DARKEST TONES

Identify where the darkest darks occur on the subject and mix a suitable dark brown using Ultramarine Blue and Raw Umber. Apply this with the size 4 or 8 brushes in confident, complete strokes. Don't use any solvent to thin the paint at this stage – using pigment neat from the tube instead.

Work towards the next darkest tones, the dark browns and oranges, by introducing a little Genuine Chinese Vermilion or Yellow Ochre to the umber mixture.

### 4 BLOCK IN THE MID-TONES

Mix Genuine Chinese Vermilion, Yellow Ochre and Titanium White to create a good mid-tone skin colour. Add small amounts of Genuine Chinese Vermilion or Alizarin Crimson to this mix for the warmer parts of the face, such as the nose and cheeks.

Balance these warmer areas with a cooler mixture of Alizarin Crimson, Ultramarine Blue and Titanium White which will give you lovely purples that work very well around the eyes, jawline and where the top of the head meets the hair.

Avoid overworking things or blending the strokes together. Keep the strokes looking blocky for now, almost like a patchwork quilt, and focus instead on achieving the right tonal values.

### 5 ADD HIGHLIGHTS

The highlights will really start to bring the whole illusion of form and shape together. When painting the highlights, avoid pure white as it can sometimes flatten the whole effect. Instead, slightly tint your Titanium White with a little Yellow Ochre or some premixed flesh colour from elsewhere on your palette.

Start to introduce the tones of the clothing, using a bigger brush so as not to take away attention from the more refined face. The blue clothing adds a welcomed cool colour to what is otherwise a very warm painting.

### 6 MODEL THE FEATURES

Start to model the facial features, working from dark to light. I use the word "model" deliberately as you should focus on the correct placement of the features and not obsess over the tiny details. Keep stepping back from the canvas, assessing how your painting looks from a few paces away.

When painting a facial feature, don't simply paint the eyeball, for example, but instead focus on the whole eye region, including the eyebrow, cheekbone and bridge of the nose.

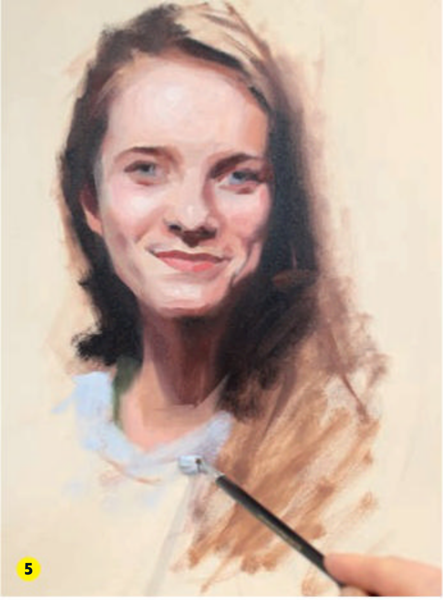
### 7 MAKE SUBTLE TWEAKS

Add cooler and paler colours to the skin tones. Greens and pale blues are observed in the hair to give a welcome contrast to the warm skin tones. Apply them very subtly, allowing them to merge slightly into the already wet oil paint. Be careful not to overwork them though, otherwise, they can end up as a brown, muddy mess.

Restate the darks and lights needed for the facial features. In this particular painting, this involved darkening the upper eyelids and highlighting the forehead, which I tried to paint in one single stroke.

To finish things up, make subtle adjustments to the hair. Be sure to paint it softly, as if it were smoke, so as not to draw attention away from the facial features.

***peterkeegan.com*** ◻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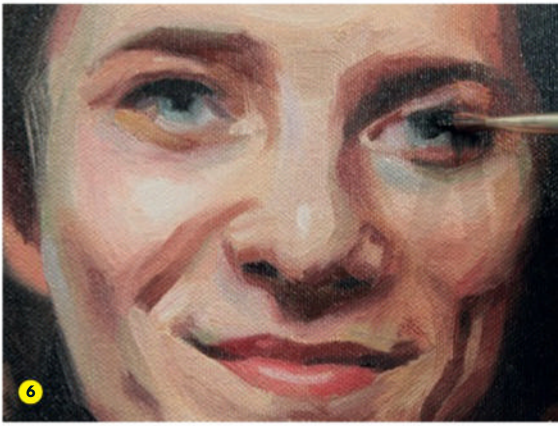
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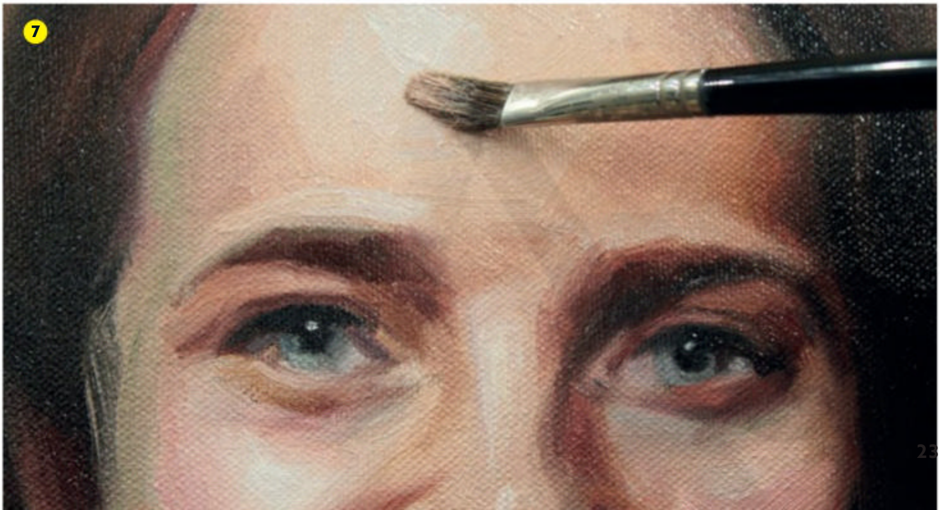
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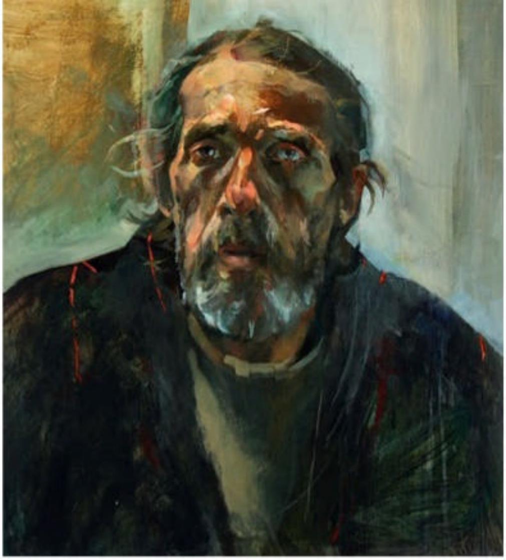
# Oils and acrylics

Combining mediums can really enhance your paintings, as **Aine Divine** explores. She finds oils over acrylics adds character to a quick portrait session



Here I'm capturing another favourite subject in mixed media: the human head. I was lucky enough to have Aonghas MacNeacail, the wonderful poet and songwriter from the Isle of Skye, as my sitter. I love his shock of white hair, the bushy brows over earnest eyes, and his wonderful capacity for weaving a tale out of thin air – all wonderful attributes for an artist's model.

I want to give special mention to a particular medium and, for this demonstration, it's the turn of oil paint. Oil paint has such weight and substance, from Rembrandt's lacy collars to Lucian Freud's fleshy nudes. There is a lush, buttery feel to it that is second to none. It sings out from the matt surface of dry acrylic paint and the combination really brings that extra substance and richness with it.

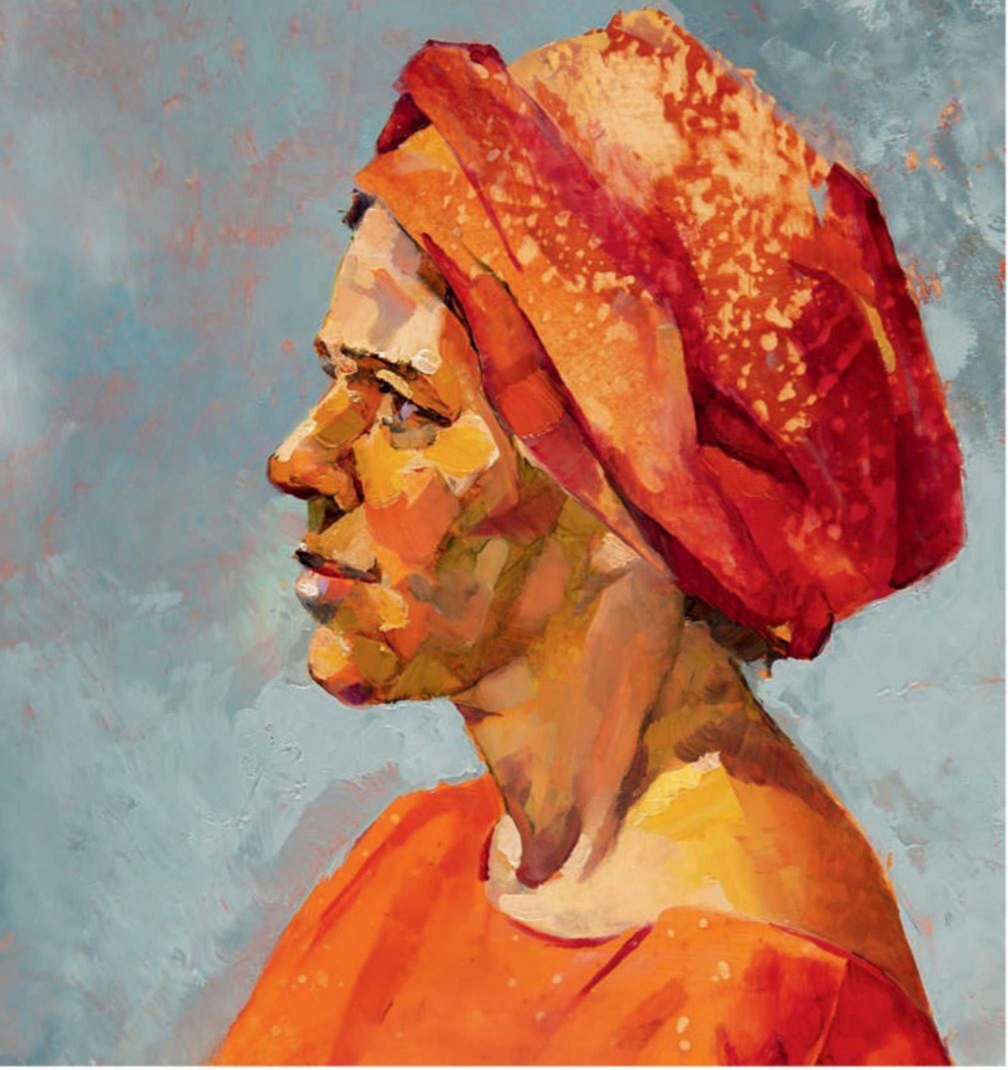
I love to use oil paint with economy so that this richness is really seen. The oil layer for me often begins with a tone darker than anything in the acrylic layer. With that, I can then better locate the lights which typically use a lot more paint. The acrylic base often serves as the mid-tone.

In the portrait of Aonghas over the page, you can see how the little dark of the nostril applied in oil paint explained the form and location of the nose, which was mostly painted in a subdued brownish mix. This dark cavity coupled with my brightest light on the tip of the nose explained the form of the nose.

Aonghas and I have only had time for one session so far, so I've included two other finished portraits here to show the benefits of oil over acrylics. In the portrait of another bearded model, Alisdair [above], the planes of the face and form of the features were clearly described with sculpted marks of oil applied over the mid-tone acrylic. I love to lift an area with a flash of bright colour, as in the red tartan pattern covering Alisdair's shoulders – oils over acrylics are perfect for this.

Meanwhile, in the portrait of Anna [right], her gold headdress was swiftly explained with a patterned acrylic underpainting. Its shape was outlined by the grey oil background, and her skin was built up with thick patches of carefully observed oil colour.

Back to today's session, I chose to paint Aonghas on an extra-large board, prepared with a layer of white gesso. I wanted his portrait to be at least twice life size to do justice to all that hair and his larger-than-life personality so a 45x60cm panel

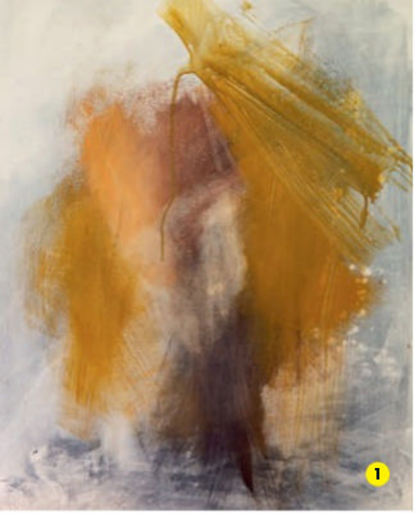


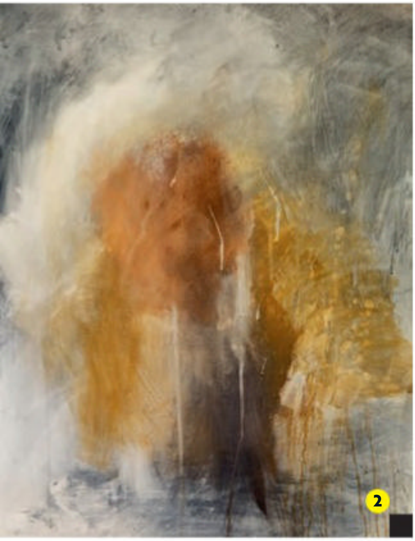
suited me perfectly. I love to work on a smooth panel rather than canvas, as I feel then nothing interrupts the flow of the paint and the sweep of the brush or rag. The energy of each arm movement remains intact on the surface, it is not diluted or diminished by the tooth of the canvas.

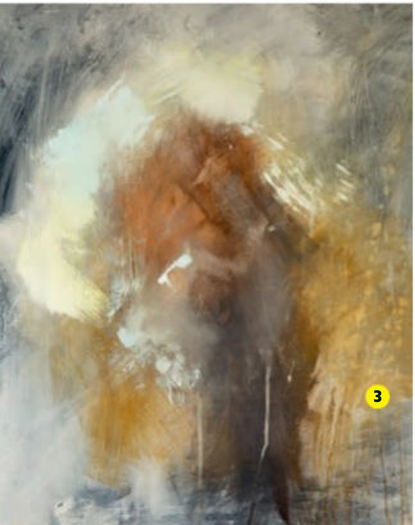
When working from life, the environment and atmosphere you create is key. A portrait sitting is a sensitive exchange and the set-up should be comfortable to allow for ease and flow. To this end, Aonghas and I took over an hour to get settled into the right positions. As always, I made sure my materials and equipment were within easy reach.

Aonghas settled on a chair, so I also sat to keep at eye level with him. When seated, be conscious of moving often to avoid any stagnation – try to lean back to see the bigger picture at regular intervals. To do this, I perched myself on the edge of my seat at arm's length from the easel, with my back straight and my chest open, fully occupying the space. I could easily move in and out to gain perspective.

I used acrylic initially, keeping the marks broad and sweeping. My aim was to fill the space quickly to describe the skin, hair, background and body before we stopped for lunch. This would provide a quick, inspiring surface over which to work in oils.







# Demo

## A first portrait session

### 1 GET IN POSITION

I find the energy at the outset is important. A confident stance works wonders here, so get in a posture of openness where you are making brushstrokes from the shoulder.

I wanted something I could work back into and wipe away, so I laid on a strong layer of Yellow Ochre with a 2-inch brush for the hair. The runs enlivened the drier, scumbled paint underneath.

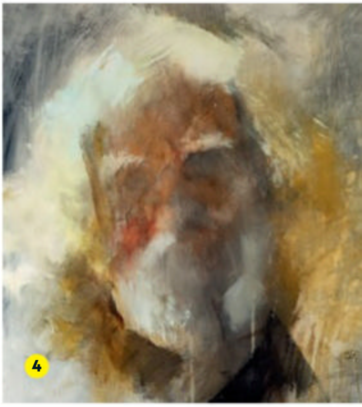
At the outset, I aim to surprise myself, to take risks, and be open to chance. To this end, I like to push for bolder marks, even if they read as ugly for a while; it gives me something to sink my teeth into later.

### 2 BE DIRECT

To capture the dishevelled chaos of curls of Aonghas's hair, I vigorously lifted off most of the wet Yellow Ochre paint with a dry rag, thereby creating horizontal marks in the hair. This allowed the downward vertical pull in the beard to be more evident. These marks in the hair turned out to be descriptive enough to be all I did to this section for much of the session.

### 3 PICK OUT HIGHLIGHTS

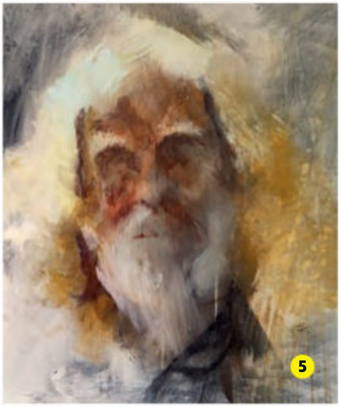
I applied Payne's Gray acrylic with a dry rag to explain the edges of the hair. I added gleaming Titanium White to indicate particularly bright shocks of hair on the head and moustache. Hair is very useful when it comes to capturing the character of an individual. I recommend giving time to observe its flow, texture and colour, then really aim to capture it in a truthful way.

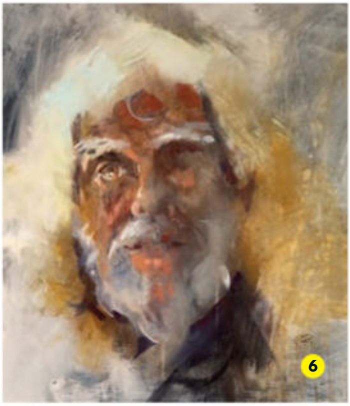


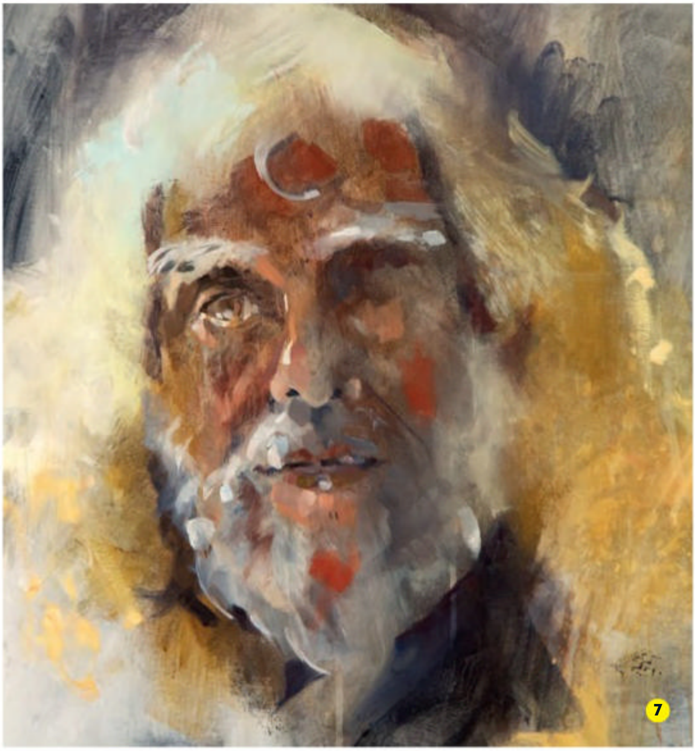
### 4 ADD WARMTH

I mixed a warm skin colour with Burnt Sienna and a touch of Ultramarine Blue. I looked at the shape of the face as outlined by Aonghas's hair above and beard below. I liked the conversational tilt of his head. Sometimes it's only once the painting is underway that the model settles into themselves, so I recommend you keep your eyes peeled for gestures that keep returning. Once the diagonal was recognised as an appealing compositional feature, I encouraged Aonghas to keep it.

I masked off an area with a straight edge to capture the grey triangle of his collar – a little geometry in the midst of all the softness bought clarity and order.







### 5 INTRODUCE OILS

After letting the acrylic dry over lunch, I started the oil layer. I use oil sparingly, so that it serves to enhance and clarify what is already insinuated in the acrylic layer underneath.

I reached for the Vandyke Brown, applied with a 1-inch flat firm brush, to nail some proportions and capture the darkest parts of the face. This created a landscape in which to locate the dip of the eye sockets. Other significant darks were the shadow to the left of the beard, the nostril, and the corner of the mouth.

**TIP**

**Use a firm flat 1/4 inch brush to chip in important details in oil, like the dark of a nostril**

### 6 MOULD THE FORM

I like to think of this stage as if I'm modelling in clay or fitting jigsaw pieces together, as I try to find the precise shape of the features and the spaces between them. It's important to maintain a curiosity about your sitter's face and aim to describe the shapes of the lightest and darkest patches of colour in particular, as these help to mould the form.

### 7 REFINE THE EDGES

With the first sitting almost over, some edges needed softening and others defined more clearly. But for now, I'm happy to give the painting some breathing space and set it aside for another session.

Do give this process of mixing acrylic and oils a go. There's plenty of opportunity for adjusting edges all the way through and really engaging with the painting.

Try applying the paint, wiping it away, losing and finding details again and again until you achieve the balance you're after – and a character you can recognise. ◻

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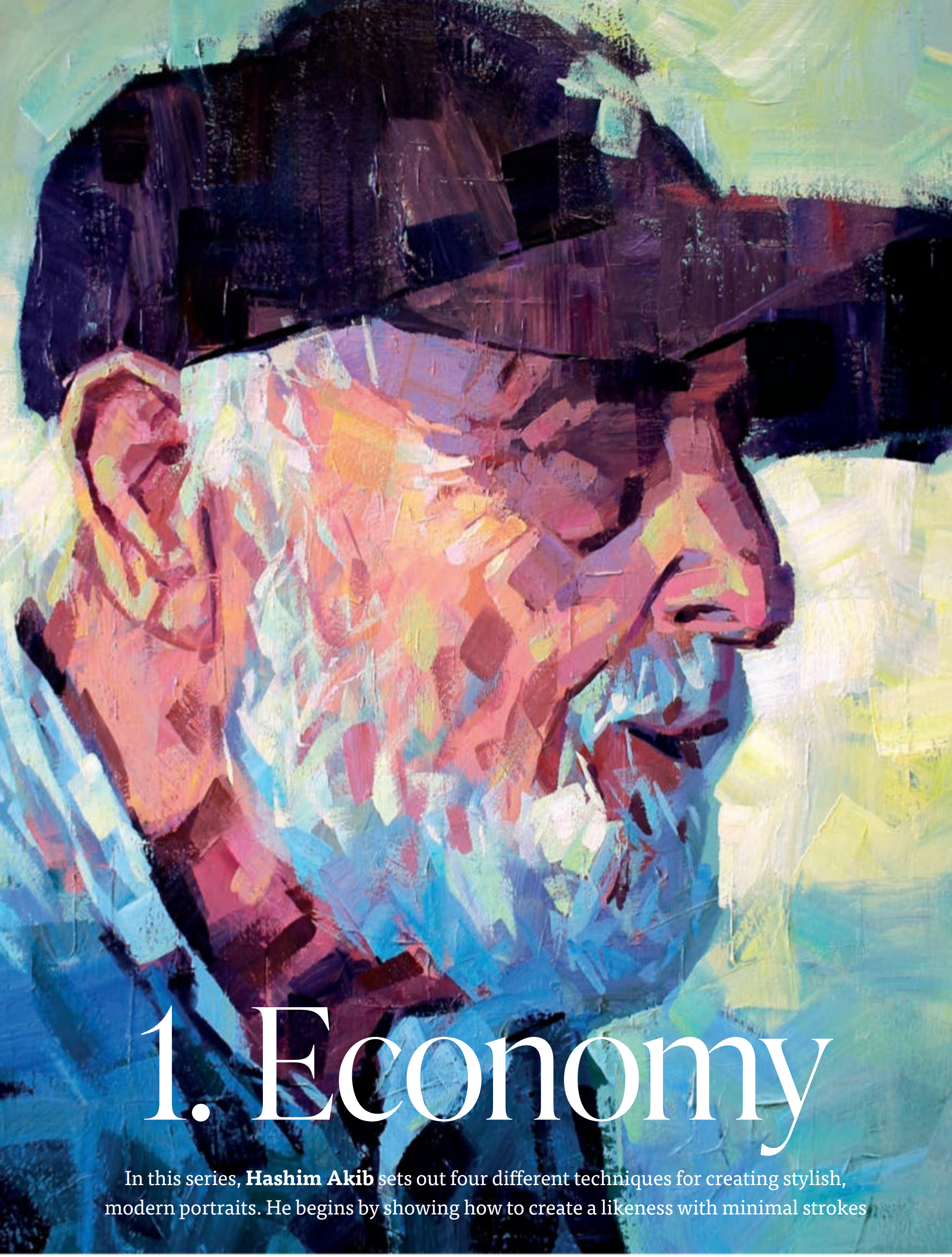


# 1. Economy

In this series, **Hashim Akib** sets out four different techniques for creating stylish, modern portraits. He begins by showing how to create a likeness with minimal strokes

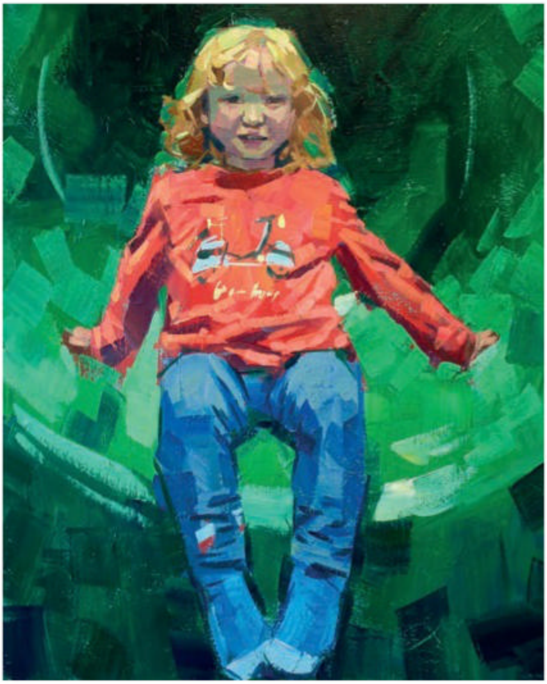
Most artists agree that portraiture is the most difficult genre to conquer when drawing or painting. Achieving a large percentage of a likeness can be dragged down by minor inaccuracies. The first and most important strategy for painting portraits is: Don't show what you don't need to. In fact, this is my general rule for any artwork. The more information you convey, the more ammunition for an overly critical viewer. Obviously, you may need more accuracy with features, but you'll be surprised what details can be left out.

Do you really need to show all the eyelashes, wrinkles, blemishes and moles? In fact, your sitter might thank you for underplaying them or leaving them out completely. You may even just concentrate on getting one eye right and blur the other, this way your focal point will be more potent. The more accurate the information you try to convey, the greater the likelihood that your concentration levels will drop – you'll often lose interest or simply obsess about minor details until you can't make any objective judgements.

This is the greatest gift experience has to offer: knowing what to leave out. Amateurs and technically-gifted professionals like showcasing technique and how well the mechanics of a painting work. This may include smooth transitions, accuracy throughout, naturalist flesh tints or very few exposed brush marks. Traditionally, before cameras, this is how you measured the gold standard of portraits. Unfortunately, someone invented the camera and they are everywhere nowadays, so painted portraits need to be elevated by the artist's creative interpretations.

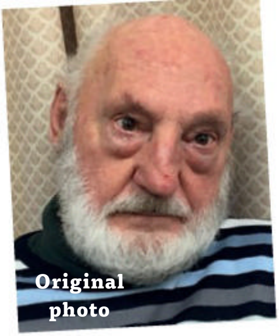
Economy of brushstrokes is a great place to start. I paint in acrylics and this is a particularly helpful medium for avoiding over-working paint. Acrylics are water-based so any excessive blending or over-diluting with more water can dull colours. Portraits tend to involve lots of fussing as features are corrected to achieve a better likeness. The rapid drying times of acrylics allow portraits to be completed in one sitting – great for keeping colours and marks consistent.

Over the page is a helpful exercise to try that involves painting a portrait and severely limiting the number of brushstrokes. Extra strokes can be useful to make up a face, so removing those takes away the pressure to create an exact likeness. ▶



**LEFT** ***Frank*****, acrylic on canvas, 61x76cm**
**"Under-working areas allows the viewer to be drawn to less obvious focal points."**

**ABOVE** ***Emily*****, acrylic on canvas, 61x76cm**
**"Children have boundless energy and portraits of them should reflect this. Over-working acrylic when painting young subjects can deaden the paint so be decisive and try to avoid the need to excessively blend layers."**



## EXERCISE

### AIM

The key to this exercise is to look for large shapes first: the forehead, the cheekbones, the chin and the neck. You could use a large flat brush and block those in fairly quickly. Trickier are the nose and mouth, which will require more thought, and trickier still are the eyes. If you're a complete novice when it comes to portraiture or even acrylic painting in general, you may be tempted to sketch a quick outline of the face first. This can stifle free-flowing brushstrokes though so try to keep the drawing to a minimum.

If you don't have someone who can sit for you, use my reference photo and attempt a portrait like the one below.

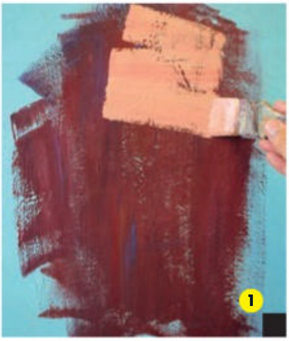
### MATERIALS

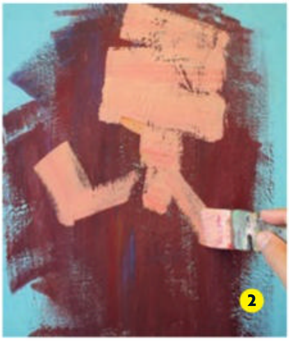
For this exercise, I painted on a 51x61cm canvas board, using a 1.5-inch Daler-Rowney Sky Flow flat brush for larger shapes and a 3/4-inch flat for details.

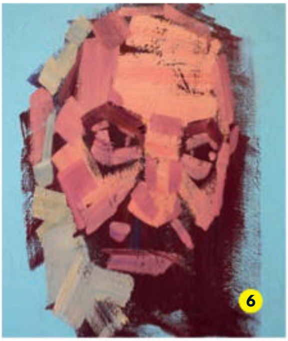
My palette of Amsterdam acrylics included Titanium White, Azo Yellow Medium, Yellow Ochre, Pyrrole Red, Yellow Green, King's Blue, Burnt Sienna, Prussian Blue and Permanent Blue Violet.

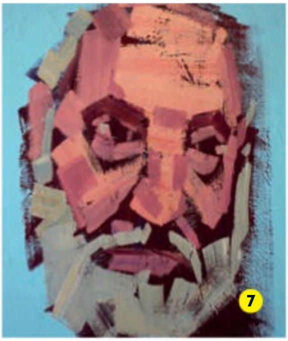
### WHAT YOU WILL LEARN

The habit of working with limited paint strokes and marks.









# Process

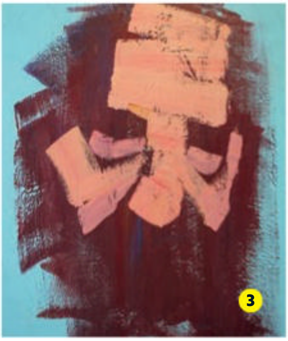
**1** Start by applying a blue base colour and allowing it to dry. Then mix a dark, reddish brown and apply it liberally over the canvas, imagining some kind of head shape. My mix included Pyrrole Red, Azo Yellow Medium, Permanent Blue Violet and Burnt Sienna, with small amounts of Titanium White, Prussian Blue and Yellow Green.

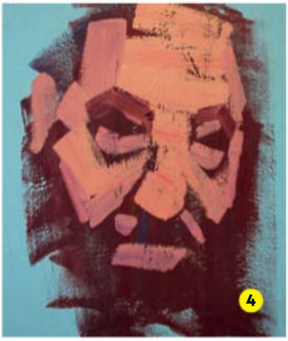
Once dry, use just three large strokes to create the forehead. I mixed plenty of Titanium White, Azo Yellow Medium, Pyrrole Red and small touches of blue, Permanent Blue Violet and Yellow Green on my mixing tray for these strokes.

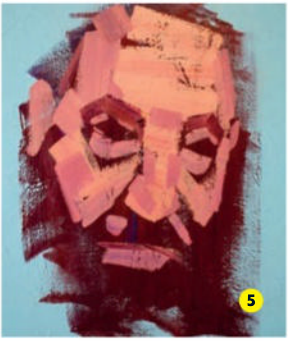
**2** Use relatively neat paint with a damp brush to keep the paint moving and to avoid it drying on the brush. Use a couple of strokes to begin to shape the nose and two diagonals on either side of the nose to form the cheekbones.

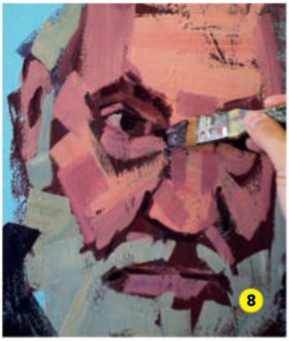
**3** Angle the strokes at various degrees rather than just using a straight horizontal or vertical – for example, at the base of the nose. Apply strokes to indicate the bags under the eyes and the cheekbones – I mixed more Pyrrole Red and Permanent Blue Violet to subtly darken the flesh tint for this.

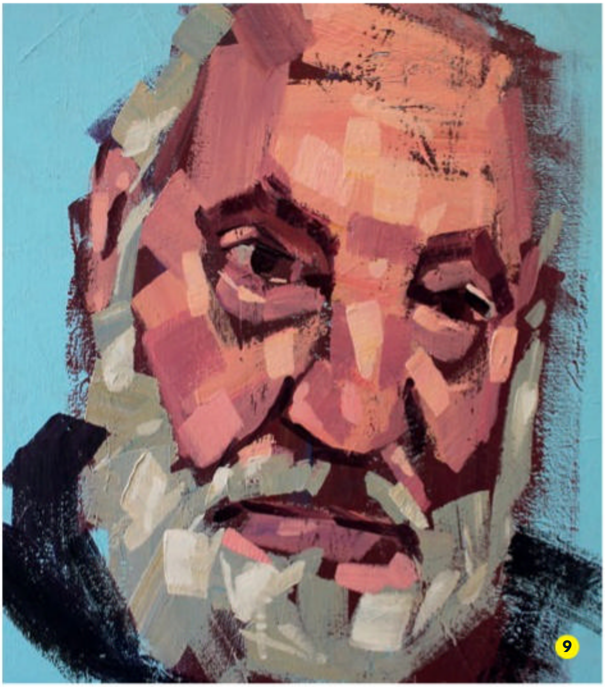
**4** Add a single, angled stroke for the mouth and a couple of dabs above the upper lip. Apply a couple of diagonals for the top eyelids and a relatively loose stroke to find the ear. I used a darker mix similar to the initial dark red flurry for the marks above the eyes.











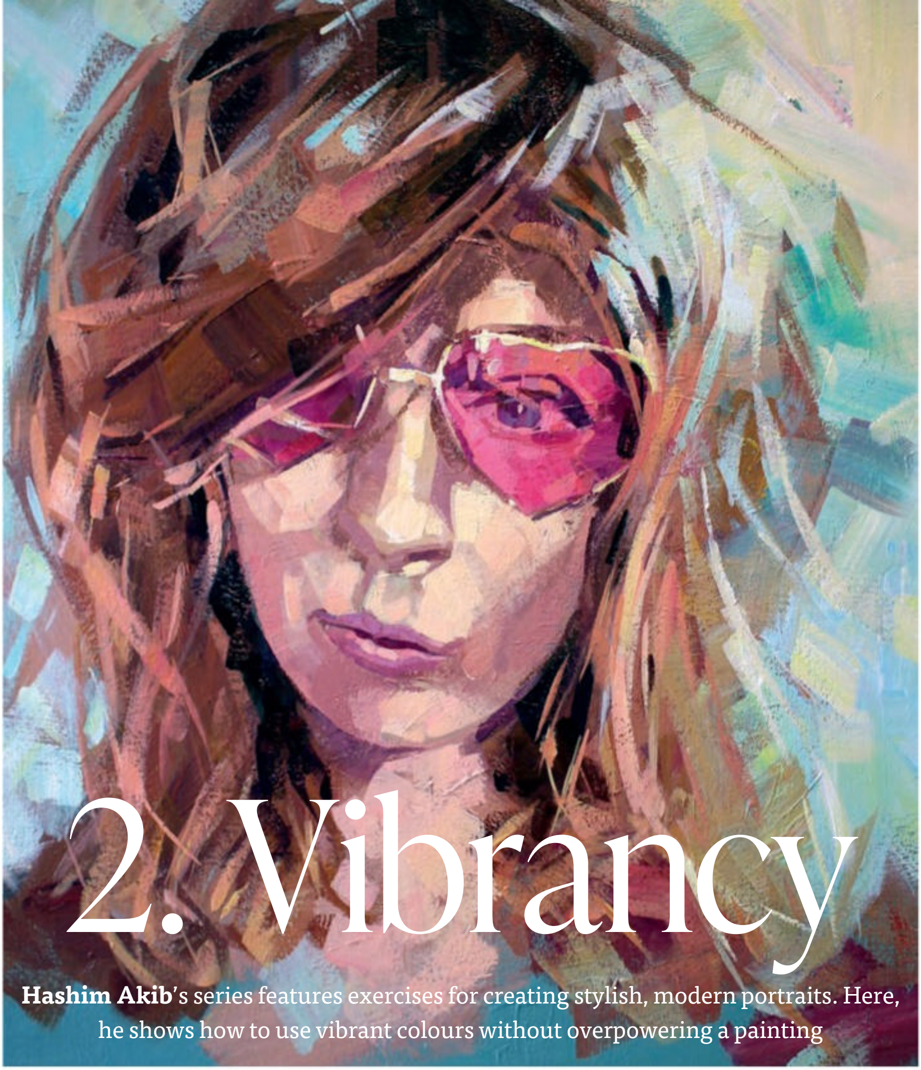
**5** By now you should have something slowly resembling a male face, but it may well be a creepy one as the eyes are absent. Apply some modelling strokes to the face using the mid-reddish tint, this time with slightly smaller, controlled blocks.

**6** Apply the whites of the eyes using the light flesh colour. Take particular care with these marks as the eyes tend to be the focal points of any portrait. Begin blocking in the facial hair with a mix of Yellow Ochre, Prussian Blue and Titanium White.

**7** Vary your strokes to create movement in the beard and add a couple of shots of the colour in the corners of the eyes. It can be extremely clumsy using a larger brush, but, with practise, you'll become used to the twists and turns of the wrist that are required.

**8** Only now should you switch to the smaller brush – in my case, this was a 3/4-inch flat. Use the edge of your brush to sharpen the eyelids, and darken the eyes and the main features. Avoid over-use of strong darks as this tone can so easily dominate – my mix was made up of Permanent Blue Violet, Burnt Sienna and Prussian Blue.

**9** The final marks you make should be the strong highlights, most potently around the eyes. Add some blocky lights around the face to accentuate the tonal contrasts within the beard. There should still be plenty of scope to develop the portrait further with more refinements and a background, but hopefully you should be able to see what can be created in a limited number of strokes. □



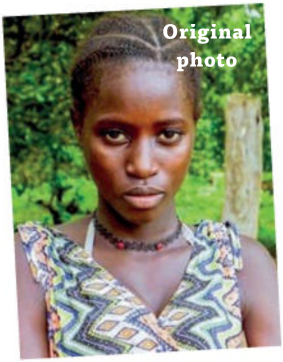
# 2. Vibrancy

**Hashim Akib**'s series features exercises for creating stylish, modern portraits. Here, he shows how to use vibrant colours without overpowering a painting

One of the main issues when painting any skin tone is the lack of strong colour. White is generally over-used to create pastel tints that can look chalky and dull. For darker skin tones, some may overuse Burnt Umber. Beginners may even be tempted to plump for a tube of Flesh Tint, which in no way is representative of the multitude of real-life skin pigments.

Skin tones tend to look consistent from a distance and colour may come from an accessory someone is wearing or a shot of colour in the background. On closer inspection, skin has a variety of subtle hues. These colours can be affected by illness, bruising, light, temperature, or reflected colour and can vary with age. Initially, it's important to simply be open to seeing these variations.

Painting portraits with acrylics can be tricky. Whereas oils allow for excessive blending and feathering, acrylics can appear flat if the pigment is overworked. In order to retain colour brilliance, try to be more decisive with your brushstrokes. This can be difficult when a certain amount of accuracy is involved, so it may be that you make allowances for the drawing in order to create a more effective overall painting. Some of my favourite portraits bear less of a resemblance to the sitter, but it's normally the case that the reference material isn't on show with the painting.



## EXERCISE 1

### AIM

Here is an exercise to explore a richer palette of strong, warm colours. Darker skin tones are a great place to start if you want to use more saturated colour. With less pastel tints, colours will have a chance to spark to life.

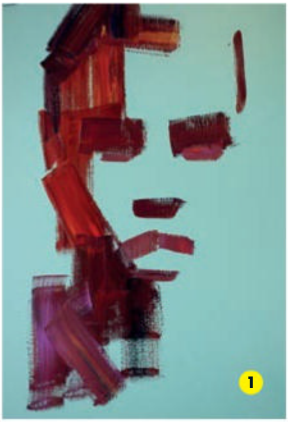
### MATERIALS

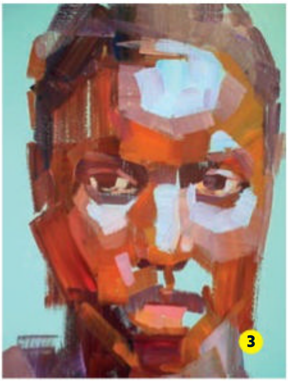
For both of the exercises in this feature, I painted on a 61x76cm canvas using Daler-Rowney System 3 flat brushes, ranging in size from one to two inches.

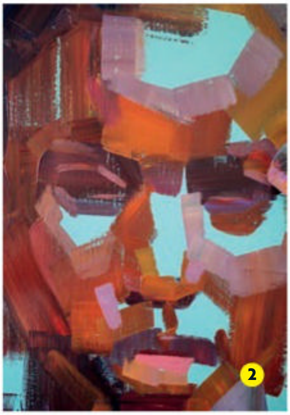
My palette of Amsterdam acrylic paints included Titanium White, Azo Yellow Medium, Yellow Ochre, Burnt Sienna, Azo Orange, Pyrrole Red, Primary Magenta, Yellow Green, King's Blue, Cobalt Blue, Primary Cyan, Prussian Blue, Ultramarine Violet and Permanent Blue Violet.

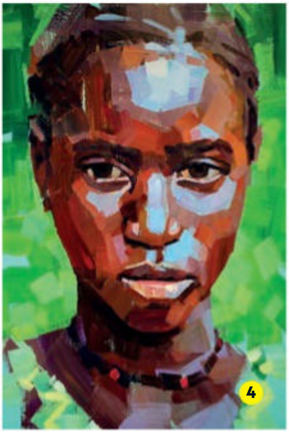
### WHAT YOU WILL LEARN

By building with solid, flat-brush strokes, using darker tones and balancing complementary colours, you will learn some quick, simple ways to use vibrant hues without them overpowering your portrait.









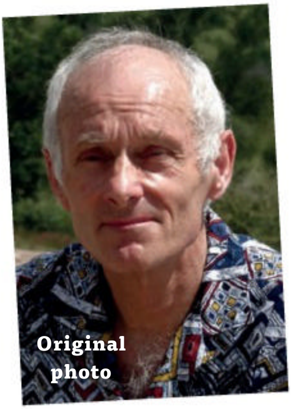
# Process

**1** Begin with a light-blue base colour, allow to dry, and apply rich warm blocks of colour over this, mainly reds with no white. This creates a simple structure on which to build a portrait and allows pure colour to dominate. Ultramarine Violet and Burnt Sienna can be added for darker tones.

**2** Use flat brushes to create definitive strokes that allow variations in colours and avoid a generic mix. Introduce very small dabs of blues to break up the warmer areas. Adding Titanium White to the warm mix can soften the colour as it slowly melds into the highlighted areas.

**3** Add more information for the features and apply cool tints to the highlights on the forehead, cheeks and eyelid – use a mix of white, blue and violets for this. Avoid fussing or over-blending as this will dull the luminosity of the pigment.

**4** Apply more dark tones for contrast and definition, which will allow other colours to begin to sit back. Shape the face further with a background colour – I chose a green to create a complement against the reds. ▶



Original photo

## EXERCISE 2

### AIM

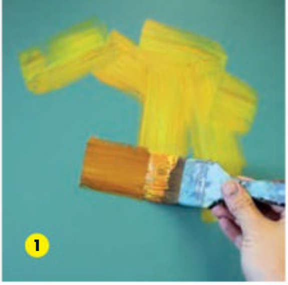
If your portraits look a little colourless, here's an exercise which initially replaces pastel tints for vibrant colour. Choose a reference photo with some contrasting tonal ranges and also replace the idea of dark and light with warm and cool colours. Warm colours will be used in light areas and cool colours used in dark areas. Some earthy or neutrals can be used to balance out some of the vibrancy and white can be added too, but the bias is mainly towards colour.

### MATERIALS

Use the same brushes and palette of colours as the previous exercise.

### WHAT YOU WILL LEARN

By changing your focus from tone to temperature, you will discover how to introduce and integrate brighter colours into your paintings.



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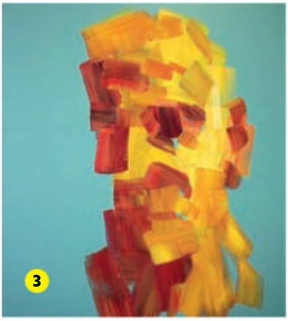

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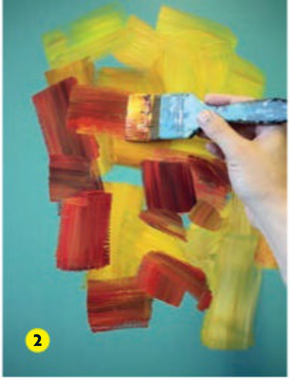

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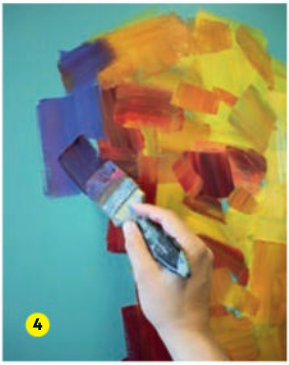


4

# Process

**1** Apply a grey-blue base colour using Primary Cyan, Burnt Sienna and Titanium White. Once dry, use a damp 2-inch brush to block in a variety of yellow mixes for the top of the forehead as this attracts the warmest light.

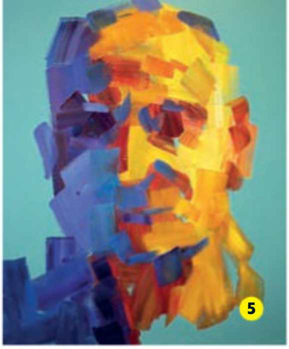
Use Titanium White to create an opaque range of yellows that will dominate the base colour.

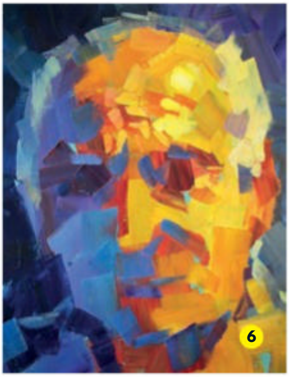
Add Burnt Sienna, reds and a touch of Ultramarine Violet to create a mid-range warm colour.

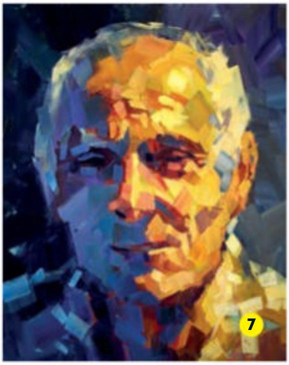
**2** Use more yellow for the bridge of the nose and cheekbones. Treat the mid-tone areas as dark reds, using Pyrrole Red, Burnt Sienna and Ultramarine Violet mixed with the yellows you have left on the brush. Initially, these blocky marks will look stark, but they will settle down as more layers are applied.

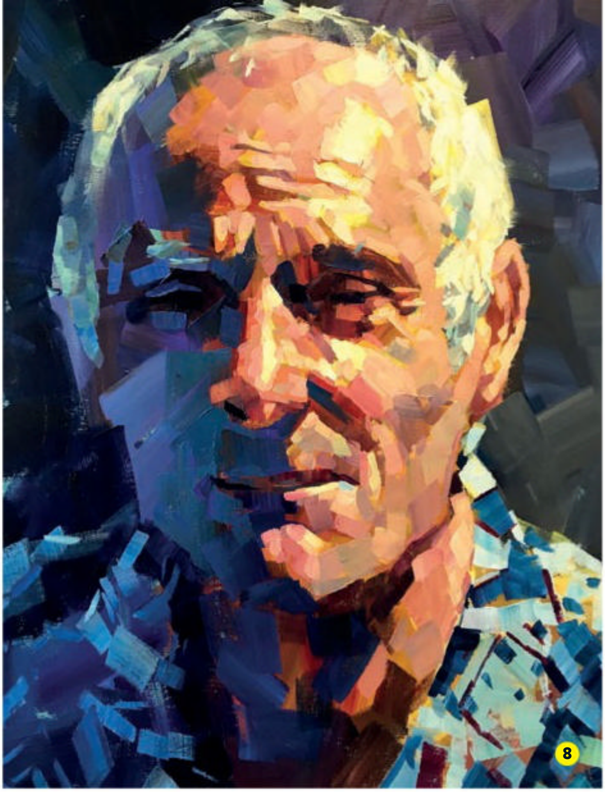
**3** Block in the light area of the face with a variety of angled strokes. The same brush can be used throughout with no cleaning and a relatively generous amount of paint added. A white, plastic mixing tray is invaluable for testing colour and, when acrylics are used in large quantities, this can be used at later stages if the painting is completed in one sitting.

**4** Use a clean 2-inch brush loaded with Primary Magenta, Cobalt Blue, Permanent Blue Violet, Burnt Sienna and a touch of Titanium White to begin blocking in the shaded area of the face. After a couple of applications, vary the colour slightly with more violet or a variety of blues. Look back at the reference photo (or sitter) to determine which sections are lighter or darker.









**5** Once the cool side is added, draw some of the blue-violet colour into the warmer areas of the face using a 1.5-inch brush. This helps link areas and substantiate the strength of tones. Use a combination of cool colours, including some Prussian Blue, to begin blocking in the background.

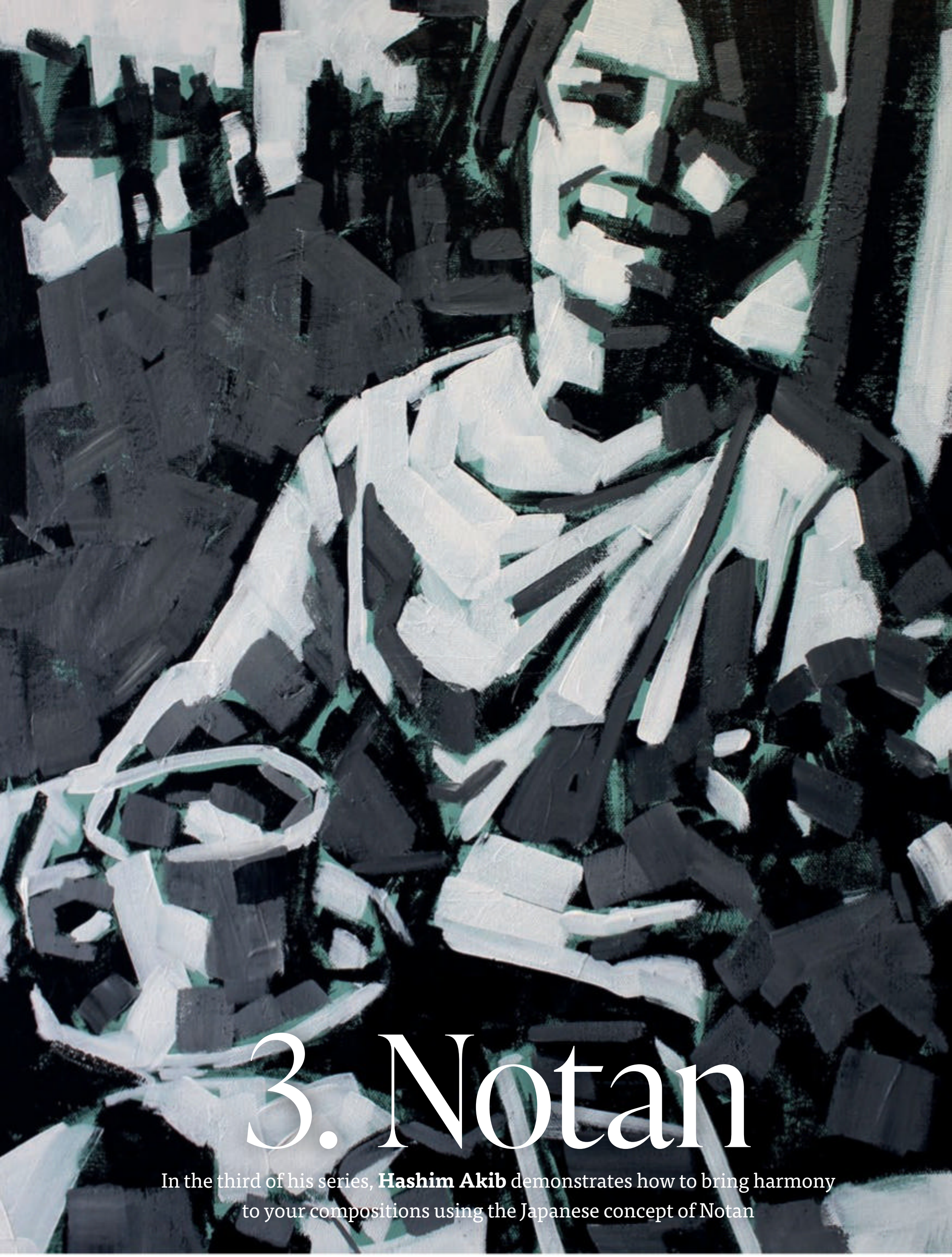
**6** Use the background colour to better shape the face, adding Titanium White and Yellow Ochre to warm the cool combinations on the right. Once the entire canvas is covered, paint the hair using Titanium White and Yellow Ochre again and making the same transition from cool to warm.

**7** Switch to the 1.5- and 1-inch brushes to start introducing crisper details. This can be time consuming as each mark needs a certain amount of accuracy.

Overlay some of the initial vibrant yellows with subtler pastel tints and earthier variations. For added vibrancy, however, avoid the actual earth colours such as Raw or Burnt Umber and instead combine complementary colours to create them, so for example yellow and violet.

**8** The choice here is whether to keep the warm yellows as they are or add a more naturalistic skin pigment. Mix pinks from various reds, yellow, Titanium White and small shots of blues or violets.

Allow pockets of the vibrant, underlying yellows and reds to filter through these naturalistic additions and elevate the pastel tints. Richer darks and purer whites can define the portrait, while the cool areas are left to complement the warms. In general, it's easier to start with vibrant colours than earthier ones as they become fully integrated with the scene rather than stuck on as an afterthought. ◻



# 3. Notan

In the third of his series, **Hashim Akib** demonstrates how to bring harmony to your compositions using the Japanese concept of Notan

Many artists strive to find the most well-balanced or harmonious composition in their drawings or paintings as this creates an image that's impactful and accessible to the viewer. Some may even shroud the design in expressive mark making or fancy detail but behind the façade there's generally a strong compositional foundation.

Most beginners just want to get painting straight away and work things out as they go. I prefer to do plenty of planning before beginning a painting, even more so now as my style has become looser and more expressive. I think about the overall design and any preliminary drawing before I begin painting. The drawing is concerned – not with details but rather – with establishing the most important elements. To some, these guidelines may dampen the immediacy of getting going or the passion for the subject. Yet without a strong design, your painting skill will be showcased on a flimsy platform.

There are a few essentials to understand when composing a painting that I've outlined in the box opposite. A lesser-known tool is the Japanese design concept of Notan, which artists use to help provide balance and harmony in drawing or paintings. Notan is relatively simple to understand and refers to the balance of light and dark areas. It can be used when composing any subject as at its core is the recognition of interesting abstract qualities that underpin an artwork. The idea is to use a basic black-and-white study to identify patterns of light and dark. In doing so, details are generalised and distracting colour is avoided.

As well as looking for interesting shapes, the main purpose of a Notan is to establish a clear path of light, framed by darks, which directs the eye towards the main focal point. This is different from using a tonal study to locate strong contrasting shades as, in Notan, we are trying to exaggerate interesting shapes, keeping the most vital ones, and editing the least important. This does away with simply copying an image and makes the overall design or compositional elements paramount.

## COMPOSITION TOOLS

### SIX ESSENTIALS FOR HARMONIOUS PAINTINGS

**1 BALANCE**
A good composition must be balanced to create unity

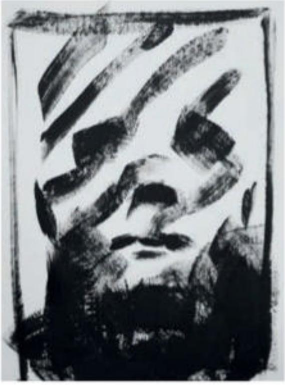
**2 CONTRAST**
Variations in tones, colours and textures add interest

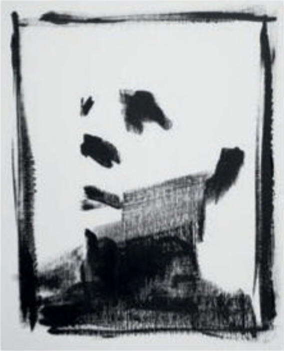
**3 DEPTH**
Consider the shape and size of your subjects in relation to one another

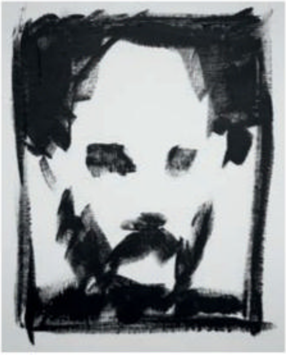
**4 REPETITION**
Similar patterns, including shapes or colours, can effectively link a scene

**5 MOTION**
Lines, such as shadows or rows of buildings, can be manipulated to direct the viewer's eye

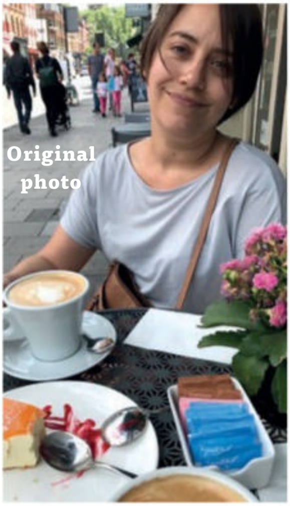
**6 EMPHASIS**
Use visual clues to draw the viewer into areas of interest or a focal point ▸







## EXERCISE



### AIM

Notan is extremely useful when dealing with figures on busy backgrounds, full figures or multiple figures in a scene. A simple Notan study can indicate the most valuable shapes and highlight what to prioritise in the scene.

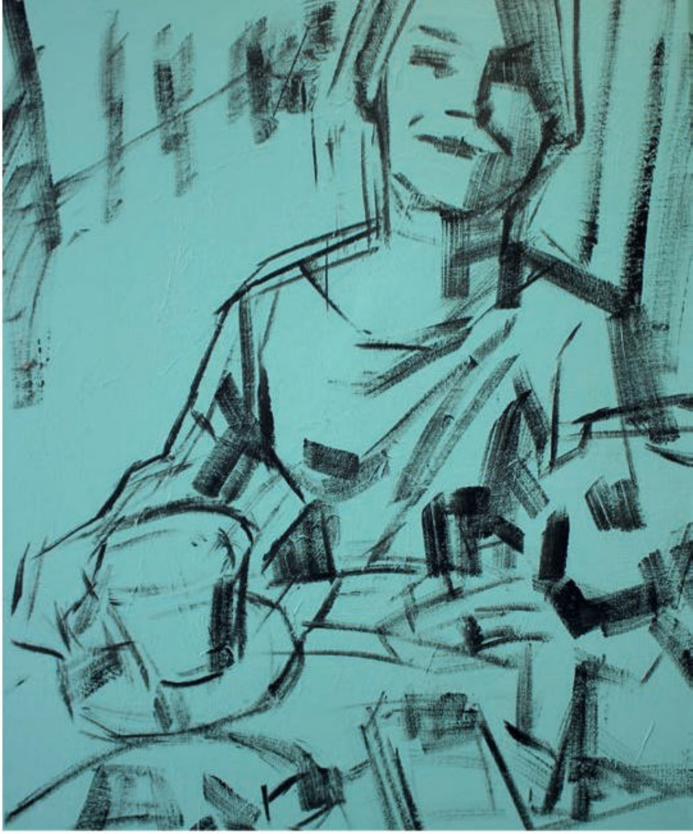
### MATERIALS

A canvas board, Carbon Black and Titanium White acrylic paints and a 0.5-inch flat brush

### WHAT YOU WILL LEARN

When working from life or a photograph which shows everything, your main concern is to edit the information down.

By employing a Notan study you will see how to immediately identify the unwanted clutter and direct light towards the face.



## Process

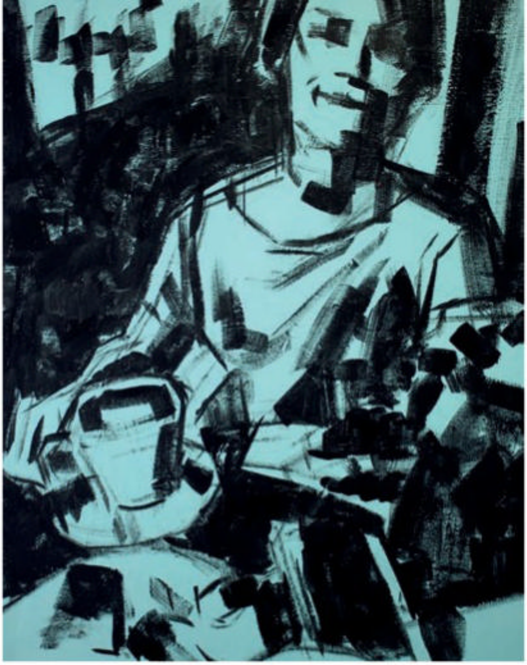
**1** Choose a complicated scene to paint. I used a photo of a busy street with pedestrians in the background. The model, Marie, is in the mid-ground, slightly cropped at the top and the foreground has a cluttered still life of coffee cups, flowers and cheesecake.

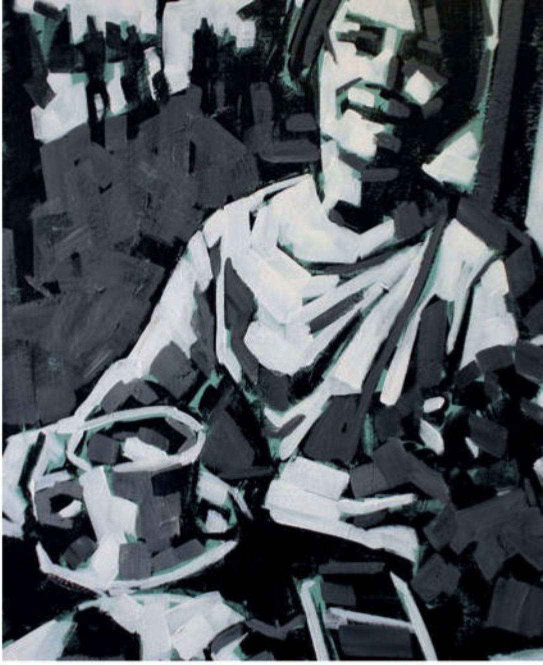
Begin your Notan with a broad outline of the scene, including most of the elements. I painted on a blue-grey ground mixed from Process Cyan, Burnt Sienna and Titanium White.

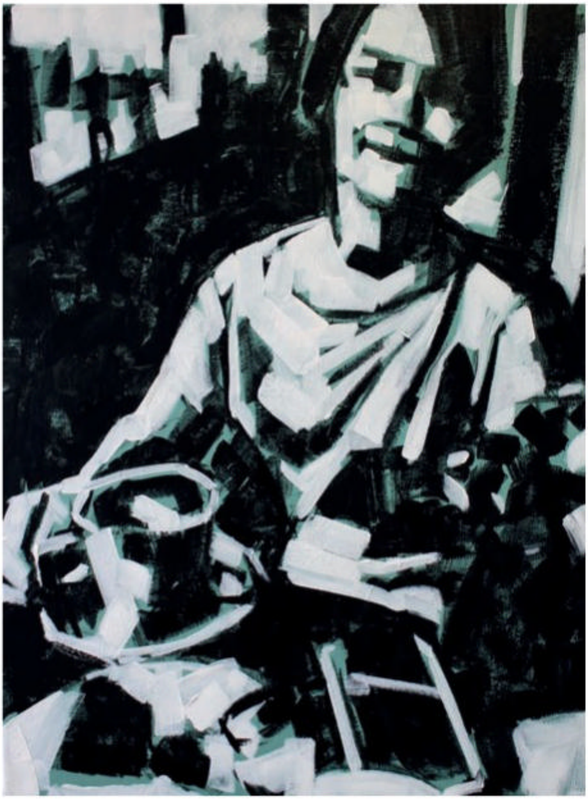
**2** Begin blocking in the absolute darks, leaving the original base colour as your initial light areas. If we start with the premise that the portrait is the “focal point”, then everything around the scene should accommodate or lead to the face.

**3** Apply a potent white to work out which shapes contribute to the passage of light, which are most interesting, and which can be removed. In my example, I used highlights to direct the eye from the base of the painting, around the plate to the cup, up the arm and towards the face. The direction of the creases in Marie’s top also lead to the face, as did the line of the street.

**4** Take the study a step further by adding a mid-grey to provide more variation in the tonal range. From here you can add colour. ◻

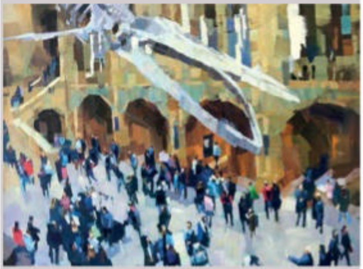


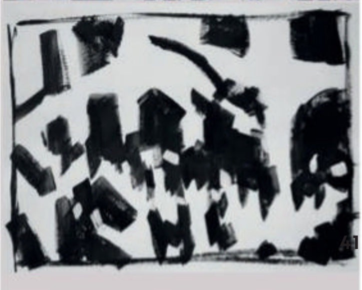


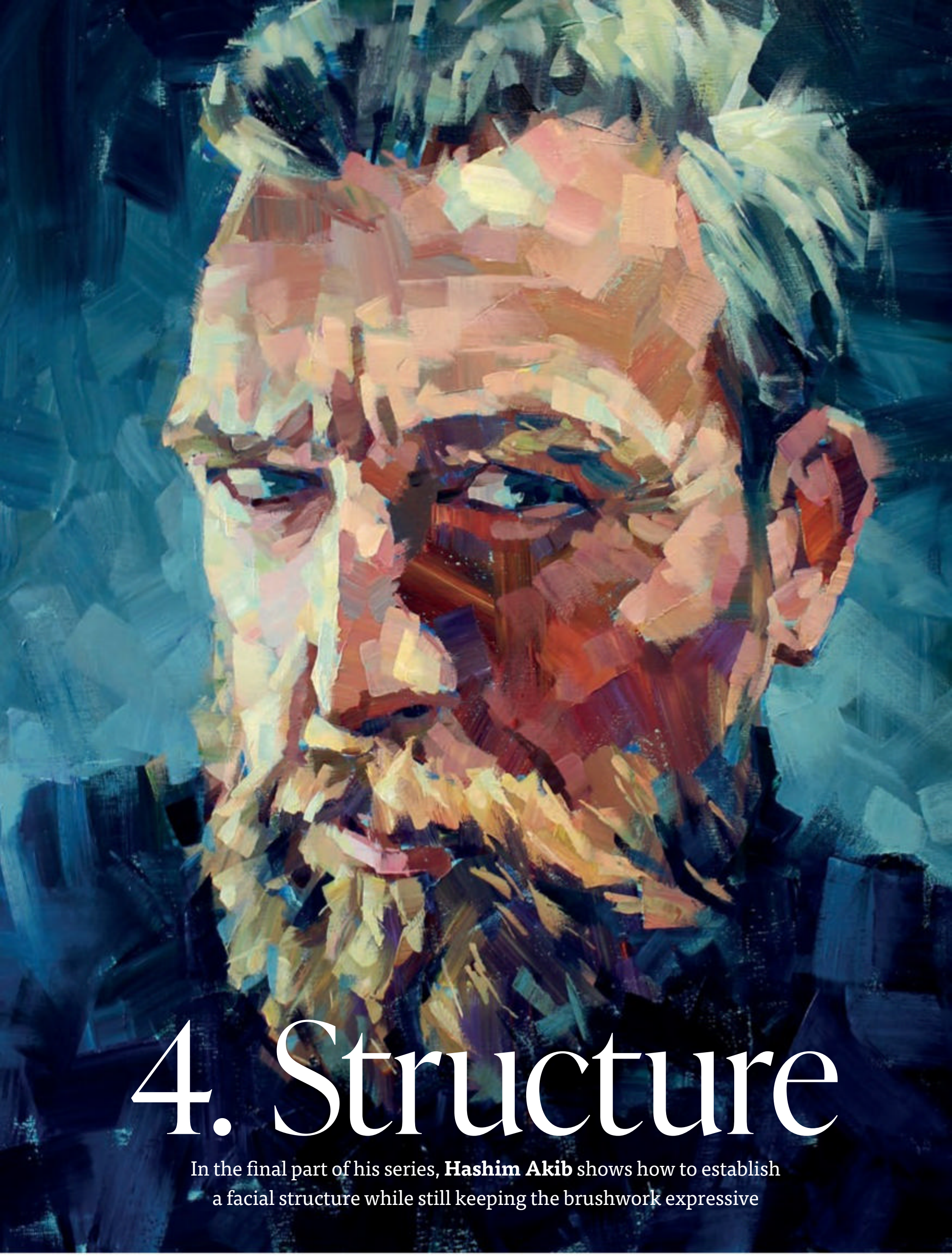


## SOLVING THE MAZE

For extremely complicated scenes with crowds of figures, a preliminary Notan sketch is invaluable. For my painting of the Natural History Museum [below], the Notan study [bottom] looks like an abstract with an almost maze-like configuration that our eyes can navigate through as we follow paths of light.







# 4. Structure

In the final part of his series, **Hashim Akib** shows how to establish a facial structure while still keeping the brushwork expressive

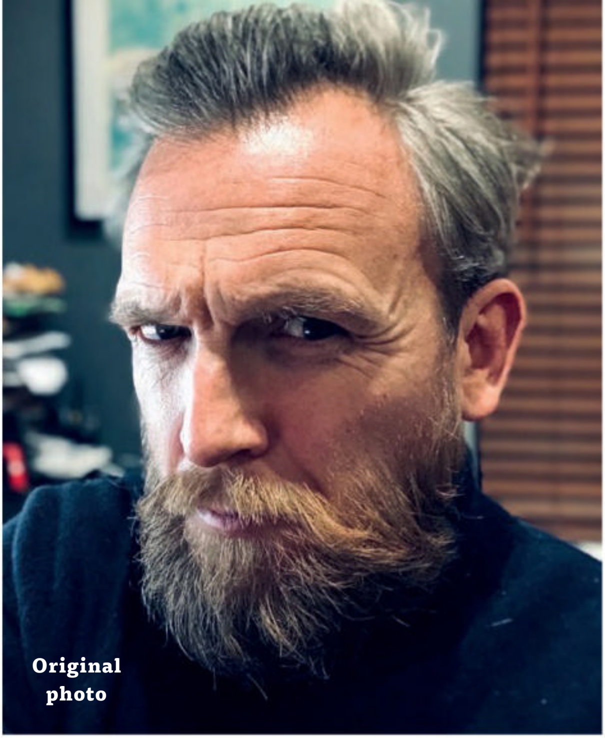
Being able to draw provides the confidence and perception to create a convincing representation of a subject. The skill creeps up on you through practise and ingrains as a habit making the act so much more instinctive.

The other skill you acquire is simply the patience to look at something. You break it down, conceptualise it, and put it back together in some kind of creative form; you might even leave bits out or reinvent the thing altogether.

It becomes tricky when balancing the need to master the drawing mechanics with the instinctive, creative urge to simply express yourself. In painting – and especially portraiture – the outline you use to guide your path can become the shackles that restrict the free movement of your arm and your imagination. You could try portraiture without an initial drawing and see what happens. The painting will look liberated, but the likeness may suffer.

Having gone through the apprenticeship of life drawing classes and picked up traditional drawing methods, I have found the trick is to forget everything. If you're a beginner there are plenty of tutorials you can follow in books, magazines, online or through workshops. These may include using a grid to break down the drawing into smaller chunks or starting with the standard egg shape and adding plenty of construction lines.

They're all valid methods, I have just found any elongated time spent on the initial drawing of a portrait kills the spark of passion and instils a sense of preciousness about the line work. This can easily stifle those expressive, confident brushstrokes that create a sense of ownership over your paintings. Starting with an accurate drawing is such a staple approach to portraiture that no one questions it.


**Original photo**

Personally, I've found coming to an image cold and expecting to nail a likeness early on, before essentially colouring it in, is asking a lot. I favour a basic start with the refinements building up and crystalising at the end. This is akin to sculpting a face and knocking it into shape over time. Any initial drawing is used to establish the main shapes that details can be dropped in later on.

I begin portraits with a 'robot' shape. These simple lines create the foundations of the portrait which, over the course of the painting, are explored. Consideration is given to unique qualities of individuals' faces – whether they have long or oval faces, or big or small ears – but left out are excessive descriptions of wrinkles or eyelashes, for example. It's also easier drawing straight lines, whether short or long, than accurately portraying a circle.

This declutters your mind, preventing you from focusing on refined edges and encouraging you instead to simply travel from A to B while locating a shape. The lack of refinement starts the process and circular shapes can be added once the main structures are in. The contrast then between angular and circular lines and shapes is far more interesting too. ▶

## EXERCISE

### AIM

For this exercise, I'll show you how to create and develop the basic structure of a portrait in a three-quarter view.

You have nothing to lose at the start of a painting but as logic sets in you can lose some of that creativity. The aim here is to try holding on to that creativity as long as you can, so the artwork reflects you rather than the image you're trying to replicate.

### MATERIALS

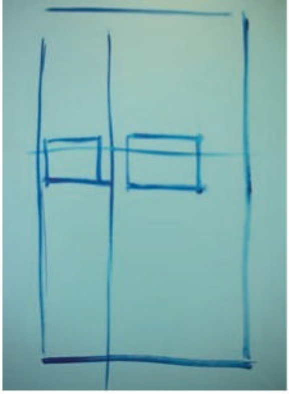
I painted this portrait of Ricky with acrylics, which does allow for quick over-painting when I make mistakes but not much time to blend, due to their relatively rapid drying times.

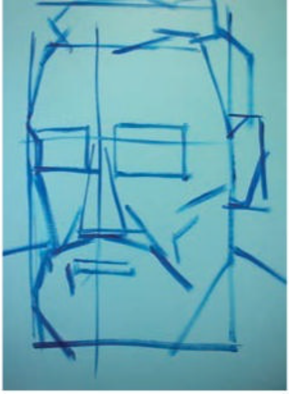
I used the following colours from the Amsterdam Standard Acrylics range: Titanium White, Azo Yellow Medium, Yellow Ochre, Burnt Sienna, Pyrrole Red, Primary Magenta, Greenish Yellow, Phthalo Green, Cobalt Blue, Primary Cyan, Prussian Blue, Ultramarine Violet and Permanent Blue Violet.

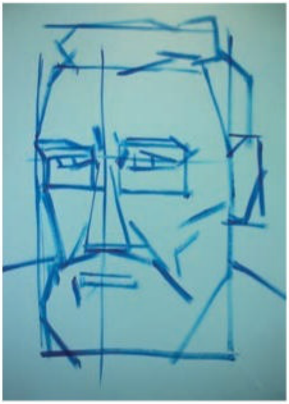
I painted on a 76x61cm canvas with larger Daler-Rowney System 3 flat brushes, sizes 1, 1.5 and 2 inches.

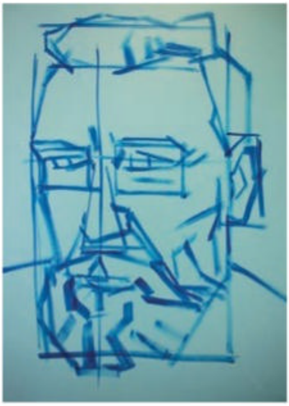
### WHAT YOU WILL LEARN

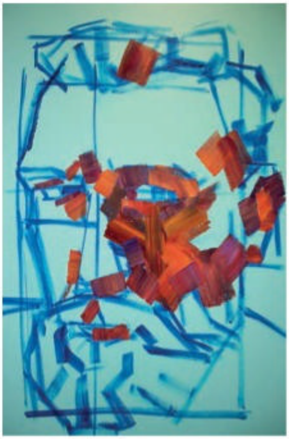
This exercise will teach you to apply whichever drawing technique you choose with a sense of urgency. By creating micro deadlines and varying the pressure in your arm when sketching, it will help you to avoid tired or monotone line work.











By loading generous quantities of paint on your brush, you will also learn to avoid overworking and instead create blocky strokes that will eventually connect together to create a full painting.

# Process

Prepare your canvas with a base colour – I chose a mix of Primary Cyan, Burnt Sienna and Titanium White. Use a 1" flat brush for the preliminary drawing as this produces looser, flowing lines. Sketch out a long rectangular box shape which roughly assumes the length of the face (including the beard in the case of my example). Add an eye line, centre line and two small rectangular boxes for the eye sockets.

The three-quarter view means everything is off-centre, so include an elongated triangle for the nose, a small squashed rectangle for the mouth and a downward rectangle for the ear. All lines should be applied loosely with one swoop of the brush – these are areas on which to base more refined shapes later.

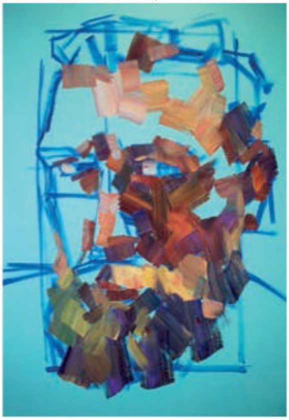
Shape the face with various straight lines, avoiding any curves. It is often easier to deal with less difficult, large areas first, such as the shape of the face and the hair, so that you can work your way up to trickier aspects such as the main features.

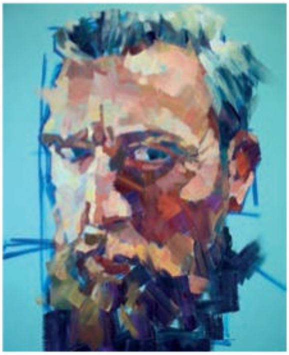
Once you've moulded the main shape, place the eyes with small, fairly accurate lines. Again, avoid over-fussing the drawing and simply try to place the eye line and then a centre line to position them, which will make it easier to find the nose later.

As the portrait takes shape, avoid becoming precious about the drawing and expect to make several changes as the painting progresses – it's enough to start the painting with a good idea of composition and the foundations of a likeness.

With the drawing in place, begin blocking in colour. Use several warm colours including Azo Yellow Medium, Yellow Ochre, Burnt Sienna, Pyrrole Red, the violets and a touch of Phthalo Green using a damp 2" flat brush.

Use several diagonal strokes to apply darker variations of warm red for the shaded areas of skin – these should follow the lines in the drawing but not entirely literally. As you concentrate on the reference material, you will draw more information in, and become better placed to sharpen up the accuracy.



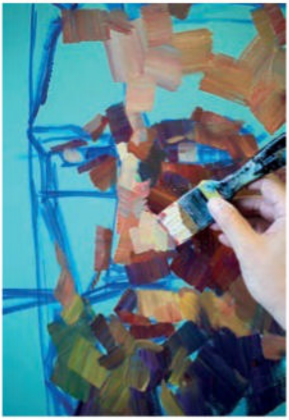


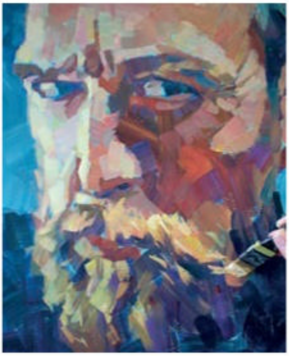
Introduce Titanium White into the mainly warm colours with subtle additions of Cobalt Blue to dilute the strength. Greenish Yellow can also heat up the light tints.

Avoid over-mixing the colours before applying them so that gentle streaks of pure colour can penetrate through. Primary Cyan, Cobalt Blue, Ultramarine Violet, Burnt Sienna and Yellow Ochre can be used for the facial hair which melds into a green ochre on the lighter side.

Use a 1.5" flat with plenty of Titanium White, Azo Yellow Medium, Pyrrole Red and dabs of cooler colour to create some highlights. This adds some lovely contrast against the darker tones.

Build the lighter tints around the face, paying particular attention to variations of colour.

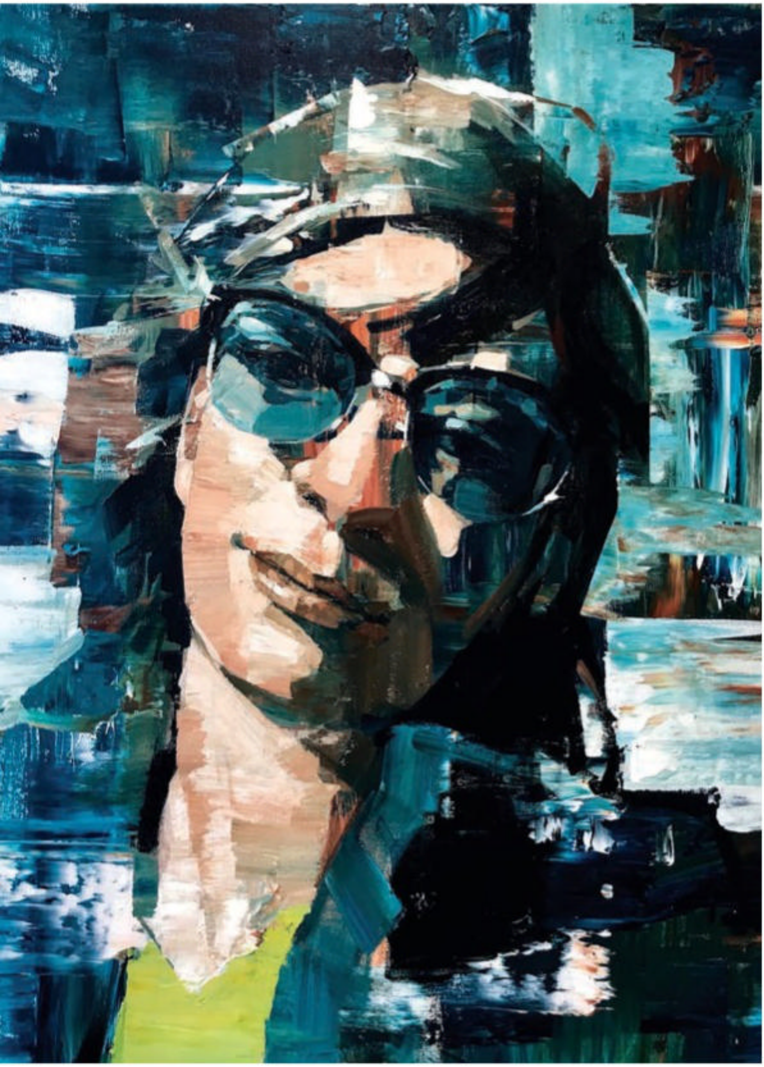




Darken the hair with a similar combination of colours from the beard with less violet and use the darker tone for the eyes. Titanium White with Greenish Yellow, Cobalt Blue and Burnt Sienna can be used for the lighter tints in the hair. Darken the top and background with the introduction of Prussian Blue mixed with other dark tones.

Use the smaller 1" brush at the end to bolster the clarity and add some crispness. These marks can slow down the painting process as more technical requirements come into play. As one area is defined, the looseness of another is exposed, so there is a certain amount of balancing to be done at the end, while trying not to lose the spontaneity of the initial applications. ◻

# Create a portrait from chaos



**Finally, Hashim explains how to create contrast with tones and brushstrokes in acrylic**

To avoid clashing, stick to a few pigments and white. For this portrait, I used Burnt Sienna and Phthalo Blue Turquoise. There is no need to draw. Use a large, flat-head brush and apply large amounts of paint. Certain areas can be neat pigment, while others can be mixed with white. Use directional brushstrokes but avoid excessive brushing. Add single layers. I also use a palette knife and plastic card to create effects. Allow paint to settle and use an outline to establish where the drawing will go. From here stick to two colours, and use light and dark variations to bring features forward. Incidental marks speak volumes avoiding the need to over-develop areas. The more polished the final portrait, the more contrast there will be against early chaotic marks.

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